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PRAYER IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

PRAYER IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

A STUDY OF SOME MOMENTS AND MASTERS
OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE FROM CLEMENT
OF ALEXANDRIA TO FÉNELON

BY

A. L. LILLEY

CHANCELLOR AND PRÆLECTOR OF HEREFORD CATHEDRAL
AND ARCHDEACON OF LUDLOW

"Ma vostra vita senza mezzo spira
La somma beninanza, e la innamora
Di sè, sì che poi sempre la disira."
DANTE, *Paradiso*, vii. 142-4.

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TO MY DAUGHTERS
BARBARA AND GERALDINE

PREFACE

THE following pages represent, with slight modifications of arrangement and the omission of a few paragraphs, my Prælections delivered at Hereford Cathedral in the Lent of 1921. The first and last chapters formed also the substance of my Murtle Lecture before the University of Aberdeen in February, 1922. It was only after the lectures had been written and delivered that I first learned, through my friend Baron Friedrich von Hügel, of the existence of Friedrich Heiler's *Das Gebet*, published at the beginning of 1918. If I had known Heiler's comprehensive and masterly study earlier, I could not, of course, have mentioned as a desideratum (p. 9) that which had been already most amply provided. But I have allowed what I had written to stand as a confession of my ignorance at the time.

Christianity, said Döllinger, and later Wilhelm Bousset said the same thing, is most adequately characterised as the religion of prayer. It is no doubt a phrase which might be picked up anywhere from among the faded flowers of pulpit rhetoric. But used by the competent and conscientious scholar, it represents a deliberate and intensive judgment. That judgment of Döllinger's

and Bousset's seems to me to be the key to a right reading of the history of the Christian religion, of its successes and its failures, its achievements and its defeats. My lectures were an attempt both to illustrate and to test that judgment at certain critical moments of Christian history and through the writings of those who seemed to me most representative of those moments. The wisdom of my selection may be questioned. But in a course of lectures which had to be fitted into the weeks of Lent, a few names only could be chosen, and I was guided in my choice by the sole desire to present the real continuity of the specifically Christian doctrine of prayer.

A. L. L.

November 6, 1924.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY—PAGAN AND CHRISTIAN PRAYER

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INTRODUCTORY—PAGAN AND CHRISTIAN PRAYER

WHEN I first went up to Trinity College, Dublin, Dr. Jellett, soon afterwards appointed Provost, had recently delivered his Donnellan Lectures on the efficacy of prayer. It was a subject which was then forced to the front by the contemporary confidence of the physical scientist in the invariable sequences of the natural process, or what was popularly known as the Reign of Law. Dr. Jellett's volume is one of the many which I am no longer able to consult because I have long since lost them. Yet I can still recall both the vivid interest with which I read it and my sense of troubled disappointment that its argument, in spite of much acuteness of development and clearness of statement, failed to convince me of its sufficiency. It was only many years afterwards that, as I came to know more of the great masters of Christian literature and pondered their incidental teaching about prayer and the general conception of prayer to which it pointed, it dawned on me that the doubts and hesitations with which Dr. Jellett and the theologians of his generation thought it necessary to wrestle would have seemed to them to have no bearing whatever on the real

efficacy of prayer. My discovery, of course, was no surprise in so far as the Fathers and the Schoolmen and even the theologians of a much later age could not have anticipated the difficulties provoked by the scientific discoveries of our own time. But what did come as a revelation to me was that there was nothing in their conception of prayer which need have felt the slightest difficulty in our modern view of the uniformity of nature if it had been then known to them. I had discovered, so gradually that it was almost unconsciously, that their conception of prayer was altogether different from that which necessarily felt the kind of difficulties against which Dr. Jellett and men of his school were contending.

And later still, as the new study of comparative religion attracted me and enabled me to appreciate more accurately the growth of various religious ideas and practices, and among them of the idea and practice of prayer, I made a fresh discovery. It was that the conception of prayer which found itself in difficulties from modern scientific theories was highly characteristic of the more primitive types of religion, and that it was just here—in its conception of prayer—that the Christian religion as illustrated by its greatest masters was most sharply differentiated from those more primitive types. I found, for instance, that prayer, as it first emerged upon the plane of human history, seemed everywhere to be a development of the spell—*i.e.*, of some formula having magical significance by which the invisible powers could

be forced to accomplish the results which men desired. When these invisible powers came to be personalised as gods, and so men began to assume distinctively personal relations with them, the spell which formerly compelled was modified into a prayer which might induce the gods to conform to the desires of men. Even in so highly a developed form of religion as was Roman religion in the time of Cicero we find this conception of prayer not only still unchallenged, but even defending itself on reasoned grounds of an ethical necessity. "We do not pray to Jupiter," says Cicero, "to make us good, but to give us material benefits." "All men acknowledge," he continues, "that every material good and all material prosperity come from the gods, but no one has ever referred to God the acquisition of virtue. For it is on account of our virtue that we are with justice praised, it is in our virtue that we legitimately glory; which would not be the case if virtue were a gift from God, and not an achievement of our own. Therefore we must pray to God for the gifts of fortune, but wisdom we must acquire for ourselves." It is evident that Cicero is there concerned to vindicate the entire freedom of the will as the *sine quâ non* of human virtue. If virtue were a gift of the gods, it would be in no sense a human achievement. And the quite obvious implication of that argument is that prayer is a request to God for those things, and for those things only, which man cannot provide and acquire for himself. Now, I do not deny

that even such a defective conception of prayer as that is capable of being highly moralised. We need not, I think, be at all surprised to find Pliny saying that "the gods delight not so much in the accurate repetition of prayer as in the innocence and holiness of those who pray, and that he who brings to their shrines a pure and chaste heart is more pleasing to them than he who offers a well-turned hymn of praise." The gods, indeed, may be more propitious to the virtuous soul; but they are no doubt well aware that what even the virtuous man requires of them is some temporal blessing which he could not by his own unaided effort procure.

Now, it is by analysing carefully the various implications of this conception of prayer that we shall most easily establish, point by point, what prayer, according to the uniform testimony of Christian theologians, is *not*. The conception of which I have been speaking implies that the freedom of the will on which human virtue depends is absolute, and that any Divine interference with it must rob it of its virtuous quality and results. The Christian conception is the exact opposite of that. It holds that the will achieves and maintains its freedom only through the operation of Divine grace; that is to say, that our original and deepest nature, though it bears upon itself the native impress of divinity, is yet so much in bondage to a heritage of evil tendency and habit that it needs the Divine co-operation and assistance at every stage of its struggle against this

heritage and of its upward ascent towards full self-mastery. Human virtue, therefore, is always and everywhere dependent on, not independent of, Divine assistance. Again, the Ciceronian conception implies throughout that prayer is a means of persuading the gods to satisfy our desires, to provide for our necessities, and especially for the necessities of the physical substructure of our life. It finds the objects of prayer in the universal needs of man on the physical plane. And by constituting these needs, however universal and legitimate, the sole object of prayer, it inevitably suggests to the individual that he, too, may without offence present his own supposed needs, the most occasional and the most illegitimate, to the gods and pray for their satisfaction. The uniform Christian tradition, on the other hand, condemns as of the nature of blasphemy every attempt or desire to bend the Divine will to our own. It conceives of prayer as the costing and difficult uplifting of our wills towards God's. It therefore requires as an indispensable antecedent of all acts of prayer an anxious desire to learn with the highest possible degree of certitude what is the will of God. It enjoins the most confident and fervent prayer for all those things which are beyond all doubt or question according to His will. And those for the Christian are just the things for which, according to Cicero, no one would think of praying to God. And as to those things for which alone the Roman prayed, and prayed with a simple and unthinking con-

fidence, the most careful Christian teaching has always insisted upon our necessary ignorance as to whether they are according to the Divine will or not, and has therefore impressed upon us the necessity of praying for them, if at all, with that reservation. And, above all, it has most consistently taught that the true attitude of prayer always includes a simple and even joyful acceptance of all the unavoidable pains and disabilities of our lives as, if so accepted, richly ministrant and contributory to our spiritual growth. In other words, it has planted the cross at the heart and centre of the prayer-life.

But there are two further points of contrast between these two conceptions of prayer which, though less apparent, are perhaps more fundamental still. The first is that in such prayer as Cicero refers to, it is mere man that prays. Man presents himself before God in and from the midst of his natural desires and necessities. The consistently characteristic Christian view has been that mere man cannot pray at all, that no movement of desire on the part of the natural man can constitute real prayer. It is God in us that prays. It is our nature penetrated by the Divine Spirit and assisted by the Divine grace that is alone capable of prayer in the full Christian sense. Prayer on this view is an essentially supernatural act. The natural man, man remaining within the circle of natural desire and appetite, is incapable of true prayer. The second distinction to which I have referred is a corollary of this. For the

less spiritually developed religions prayer is a natural act, or rather a series of discontinuous acts, of the natural man. For Christianity it is a continuous spiritual state within which separate acts, indeed, find their place, and to the support and even the gradual formation of which they can contribute. But the simplest act of prayer of the Christian type is already an effect of Divine inspiration, and it is not their mere repetition, however frequent, but their separate and varied representation of a continuously inspired state of soul that constitutes them authentic instances of prayer.

The history of prayer has, so far as I know, not as yet been even attempted.* But the data furnished by anthropology and the allied sciences are being so rapidly accumulated that it ought soon to be possible to attempt it with some fulness. And when it comes to be written, it will be found that at no point is Christianity more clearly and sharply distinguished from all earlier forms of religion, including the earlier Israelitish religion as we know it from the more primitive elements of the Old Testament record, than in its doctrine of prayer. Indeed, to the mere historian of religion, concerned only with the gradual development of the various elements which are common to all religions and provided with abundant data for the study of such development, nothing can be more surprising than the width and depth of the chasm which separates

* See Preface, p. ix.

the Christian conception of prayer from all more primitive conceptions. He may well wonder even at the sureness of spiritual instinct with which the great Christian theologians selected amongst and interpreted the materials of revelation. It would have been easy for them, for instance, to interpret much of the figurative language used even by our Lord Himself in enforcing the need of earnestness and importunacy in asking, so as to support quite primitive and degraded conceptions of prayer. And, as a matter of fact, popular Christianity has very often yielded to this temptation, and with unconscious blasphemy has literalised the hyperbole of some of our Lord's parables into an advocacy and defence of practices which are hardly distinguishable from such magical perversions as the prayer-wheel of the Buddhists. Yet it would be impossible, I think, to find a single instance of such an aberration in any of the great teachers who have shaped the Christian doctrine of prayer. That doctrine of itself distinguishes Christianity as the crown and summit of religious attainment among men. I do not, indeed, mean to affirm that such a doctrine is altogether unknown to other religions. Most of the more advanced religions, and especially Judaism and Mohammedanism, have produced individual mystics and even large mystical coteries among whom much the same conception of prayer has prevailed. But Christianity alone has taught it as its approved and uniform doctrine.

CHAPTER II

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA AND
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THE specifically Christian doctrine of prayer first assumes something like systematic consistency in the writings of Clement of Alexandria. Clement lived through the last half of the second century and for some few years on into the third. He was a scholar, pledged to the practical solitude in the midst of human affairs which is at all times the scholar's lot, and therefore had little influence upon the life of his time. Yet he has left a permanent impress upon the history of Christianity, and that by virtue of the very qualities and circumstances which deprived him of any considerable influence upon his own age. Such influence as he did wield immediately and locally was the result of his work as a teacher at the famous Catechetical School of Alexandria. Thither, after some years of study at Athens, he came somewhere about his thirtieth year, and found his honoured and beloved master Pantænus in charge of the school. For twenty years, as Pantænus' colleague and successor, he taught at Alexandria till driven into exile by the persecution under the Emperor Severus in the year 202.

The remaining ten or twelve years of his life he seems to have spent mainly in Syria and Asia Minor, and in the opinion of many of the most competent authorities, it was during those years that a great, if not the greater, part of his literary work was accomplished. Clement's life, then, throughout was that of a scholar. But the life of the scholar, and especially of the Christian scholar, was not in those days so self-contained and apart that it could not, if occasion arose, address itself successfully to the satisfaction of the intellectual or spiritual needs of the ordinary man. And it would seem, from a letter written by one of Clement's pupils, Alexander, who was bishop of one of the Churches of Cappadocia, to the Church of Antioch, as if Clement after his departure from Alexandria may have spent some of his time and of his own rich spiritual resources in comforting and confirming the Churches which he visited. It does not, at least, seem an unwarrantable inference from Alexander's words: "I am sending this by the hand of Clement, the blessed elder, a man whose worth has been put to the proof. In the providence and oversight of God he has visited us here and established and increased the Church of the Lord."

But it was in the intellectual atmosphere of Alexandria and surrounded by the rising Neoplatonism that the religious life of Clement was formed. And so it was inevitable that he should come to attribute to knowledge a preponderating—it may be admitted at once an unduly pre-

ponderating—part in the formation of the religious life. But, whether for good or for evil, he left upon Christian theology the permanent impress of his intellectualism. The more immediate influence upon S. Thomas and the Schoolmen may have been the specific type of intellectualism derived from the study of Aristotle. But it was the definitely intellectual bent given to Christian theology by Clement that forced the Schoolmen to seek fresh sources of inspiration for perfecting its intellectual character. Now, if we are to do justice to a religious attitude which is very unlike our own, we must try not merely to appraise its results, but to understand its motives. And these latter are to be sought in the Platonic conception, perhaps I ought to say more generally the specifically Hellenic conception, of man's spiritual nature. To the Greek the mind was the only element in man's complex nature which was capable of apprehending or getting into any kind of living touch with the Divine Nature. The will and the affections were, for the Greek, subject to unceasing perturbation from the constant and varied assaults of foes without and within, of what Christians called the world, the flesh, and the devil. It was the heart of man that was deceitful above all things. All that we mean by the heart was the predestined victim of illusion. By the necessities of its own nature it took evil for its good and rejected good as its evil. And so it was the natural theatre of all the malign and multiform activity of evil spirits. Through

his mind alone could man become relatively free from this nightmare of illusion. For the mind was at least capable of disengaging itself from the tangle of passion. By its own nature, indeed, it stood outside that tangle. It naturally sought to know things as they were, to recognise good as good and evil as evil. Its quest of truth was essentially a moral quest. And not only had it a moralising effect, but it was the only ultimately moralising power. Knowledge when achieved, though of course its achievement was the most difficult thing in the world, was righteousness, and all wrongdoing was essentially ignorance.

Now, to this general conception of man's nature it is only necessary to apply the specifically Christian idea of grace in order to understand the heritage of Christian doctrine which Clement left to the Christian world. Since for Christianity the assistance of Divine grace is indispensable to all spiritual renewal and growth, it follows that that assistance is given to, and is primarily received by, the intellect. Only that part of man's nature which is naturally free from the disturbance of passion and the wiles of the enemy is capable of being divinely assisted towards perfection and of reducing the refractory seat of the passions beneath its sway. The perfect man, therefore, the perfected Christian, is the man who has attained to the perfect Divine Knowledge, or rather—for even Clement would not claim for the Christian still in this world of illusion a knowledge which was absolutely imperfectible—to the highest de-

gree of Divine Knowledge to which man here can attain. This man is Clement's Gnostic.

To complete this outline of the Clementine theology, it is necessary to add that it did not for a moment forget, much less deny, the primacy of love as a constituent of Christian perfection. Only, love was the ultimate and necessary result of the perfected knowledge, not the necessarily wayward impulse (so, at least, it would have seemed to Clement) of the affections. We can love only what we know, would have been his contention, and the perfected knowledge involves, or rather is already, perfect love. Clement would not, probably, have denied that once the mind has entered seriously upon its quest of knowledge, it may be aided by the degree of love for its object which that quest has already generated. Here, as everywhere, there is action and reaction between aim and result in the process of growth. The aim is already in some degree an anticipation of the result, and is, in turn, stimulated to further and fuller activity by the measure of the result already achieved. But, further, Clement could not, as a Christian theologian, have overlooked this reflex action of love upon knowledge. For the very essence of Divine grace, by which knowledge was *ex hypothesi* assisted towards its perfection, was a communication of the Divine love to the mind of man. But all this must not blind us to the fact that, for Clement, love was the corollary and complement of the perfect knowledge. Divine love helped us to know God per-

fectly in order that we might so be able to love Him perfectly in return.

Now, at the risk of becoming monotonous, I would insist again that this conception, so alien to all our present-day ways of thinking of religion, left a profound impress on all later theology, and that it is impossible to appreciate the strength and weakness of orthodox Christian theology without remembering that fact. Let me try to indicate some of the gains and losses for religion which seem to be involved in it. We need not subscribe either to the moral primacy of the intellect which Clement asserts or to his corresponding depreciation of the will and affections in order to recognise a certain austere rectitude, detachment, permanence about the affirmations of the intellect which are altogether lacking to the firmest attachments of the affections or to the most strenuous and sustained aspirations of the will. In other words, things are what they are, whatever may be our affective attitude towards them. They are what they are whether we like it or not. And the recognition of that necessity has, or at least is capable of having, a bracing, chastening, finely disciplinary effect not only upon the mind itself, but upon the whole moral nature. But it is not only the act of obeisance before the ascertained truth that has this moral tonifying power. It is especially the quest of a truth which is, and will always remain, independent of our wills and desires. To seek for such a truth under the hard conditions imposed

by its very nature, to seek it as we must in spite of its consequences to and for ourselves, is, and will always remain, one of the highest and most effective disciplines of the human spirit. Humility, faithfulness, self-suppression, or rather the high conquest of self, are among the virtues which it promises and secures.

But there is another side to the shield. We may persuade ourselves that we have reached the truth when we have not reached it in fact. And we may the more easily persuade ourselves that this is so, the more remote and majestic the truth is. In physical science, for instance, there is practically no danger of this kind. But with regard to the truths of religion the danger is constant and pressing. The intellect becomes wearied by its own disappointing effort, and is tempted to assert as the final truth the stage at which its relaxed nerve has finally abandoned the effort to know. That is the history of much Christian dogma. Christian theology, with its traditional intellectual temper, was pledged to seek the truth-value of the various objects of its faith, and for many centuries nobly fulfilled the pledge. But there came a moment—that moment varied for the different doctrines involved, and for some doctrines it is not yet come—when the further effort to know was abandoned. And then intellectualism in its own defence was almost forced into the illusion that it had achieved the final truth in that particular field of doctrine. At such a point a non-intel-

lectualist theology could have admitted its failure to approach more nearly to the mystery. It could have afforded to proclaim the bankruptcy of the purely intellectual method. A purely intellectual theology could not afford to do so. It had no resource but to believe, and to enforce the belief, that the truth which it had there reached was final. Hence, for instance, the Christology of the sixth century, which represents the last exhausted effort of Christian thought to deal with the nature of our Lord's Person, assumed the character of an imperfectible knowledge of that great mystery.

There are thus grave deductions to be made from the value of a purely intellectualist theology, whether as moral discipline or as intellectual possibility. We no longer regard it as possible to sound with a mere intellectual plummet the deep mysteries of God, and the more thoughtful among us, I think, no longer regard as a moral discipline the mere gesture of assent to definitions which we admit cannot adequately define their object. Are we to say, then, that the intellectual method to which Clement definitely committed Christian theology has at last revealed its bankruptcy? Personally, I am by no means prepared to say so. What I would say, rather, is that the knowledge which Clement proclaimed as the way of perfection, the mode of ascent to God, did, at some not very definable moment of Christian history, break off into two ways. In Clement's conception of knowledge there was a

distinctly mystical element. It would be difficult, I think, for the closest student of Christian history to say exactly at what moment or owing to what exact causes mysticism assumed a life of its own. For certain of the greatest minds of Christendom, indeed, the separation has never been effected. But it is, at least, true for general Christian thought that the action of the intellect became less and less mystical, and what was called the mystical experience less and less controlled and guided by the intellect. And it is of this hard intellectualism, evacuated of all mystical content and divorced from all mystical method, and of it alone, that a state of bankruptcy may be unhesitatingly declared. The case is quite different with Clement's intellectualism. It is in his conception of prayer that we can most adequately feel the difference and put it to the test. For Clement, as for S. Augustine, for S. John of Damascus and for S. Thomas, prayer was "ascensio mentis in Deum"—the ascent of the mind to God. The constant use of the word "mind" is significant. But, remember, its significance is determined by the conception which I have already repeatedly insisted on—the conception of the mind as the directive element of the human spirit through its naturally greater freedom from all the disturbance of the passions. None of these great masters of the human spirit thought of the activity of mind apart from its power to uplift the whole spirit out of the tumult of passion. That was for them

its characteristic activity. The mind was never for them the soulless instrument of mere discursive reasoning, of the naked logical or dialectical process. The mind, indeed, sought truth, the essential nature of reality, because it was supremely its function and its nature to seek it, but in seeking it successfully it carried of necessity the whole nature with it. Therefore the ascent of the mind towards God was necessarily the ascent of the whole nature towards Him.

Now let us look a little more closely at what Clement meant by the intellectual element in prayer. A man will pray, he says, for whatever he most sincerely desires and aspires after. Or, as he puts it otherwise, the subjects of our prayers are the objects of our desires. But how are we to know whether our desires are in accordance with the will of God? For if they are not in accord with His will, their satisfaction will be an injury both to ourselves and others. To know, therefore, the will of God is the essential preliminary to all true prayer. But to know the will of God is only possible through a perpetual converse with God. And that converse with God, the atmosphere in which alone legitimate requests can be addressed to God, Clement calls the real prayer of the Gnostic. Now, what is involved in that converse with God? It involves a familiar and constant contemplation of the perfect goodness in itself and in its unceasing care for man's salvation, and therefore the vision of that perfection for which in God's purpose man's nature

was destined. But it involves also a constant and besetting sense of our own actual imperfection, a steady hatred of and revulsion from it, an equally steady purpose of victory over the movements of the passions and of escape from their tumult, and, finally, an abiding joy in the self-discipline by which alone that conquest can be achieved. The prayer, therefore, of the Gnostic is a constant state. The converse with God which it implies must have become habitual, a second nature, or rather a recovery of the first and more authentic nature. Behind all our ordinary activity, informing and directing it all, there must have grown or be growing this near and intimate sense of God's presence with us and in us, this joyful inner abandonment of ourselves to God as to our own highest nature and destiny. "Holding festival in our whole life," says Clement, "persuaded that God is altogether on every side present, we cultivate our fields, praising : we sail the sea, hymning ; in all the rest of our conversation we conduct ourselves according to rule. The Gnostic, then, is very closely allied to God, being at once grave and cheerful in all things—grave on account of the bent of his soul towards the Divinity, and cheerful on account of his consideration of the blessings of humanity which God hath given us." This is what Clement understands by the apostolic injunction, "Pray without ceasing." Make your whole life an increasingly familiar converse with God, so that that converse may increasingly impress upon your life

a definite character which will manifest itself in your every desire, purpose, and action. As he puts it elsewhere, "If the presence of a good man, through the respect and reverence which he inspires, always improves him with whom he associates, with much more reason does not he who always holds uninterrupted converse with God by knowledge, life, and thanksgiving, grow at every step superior to himself in all respects—in conduct, in words, in disposition?"

But is there, you will ask, no room in Clement's scheme for prayer as we usually understand it, petition? Most unmistakably there is. Specific requests are the most fully conscious moments of prayer, the moments of most energetic aspiration towards God of the total character formed by habitual converse with Him. Petition especially needs clear and definite knowledge of what the Divine will is, and will warrant us in asking. The purpose of the whole Gnostic training is to give us that knowledge. For already in Clement we find that anxious concern, which is the characteristic attitude of all the great masters of the Christian life, to conform every desire of ours to the perfect and unchangeable will of God, to chasten and subdue the natural impulse which make His omnipotence the minister of our chance desires and would use even prayer for that purpose. He already lays down that rule which we shall find repeated throughout the whole history of the Christian doctrine of prayer, that the only things we can pray for with an absolute certainty

that they are according to God's will, and that it is, therefore, absolutely right to pray for them, are, as he puts it, "the things which are really good, the things which concern the soul." He distinctly lays it down, indeed, that the Gnostic—*i.e.*, of course, the Christian seeking to be perfect—"in accordance with reason will ask for none of those things in life required for necessary use." We may, perhaps, be surprised at this express restriction, when we remember that the Lord's Prayer is the constant norm used by all the Fathers in their exposition of the nature of prayer, and then recall the clause, "Give us this day our daily bread." But, then, we must remember also that this petition was universally interpreted by the Christian Fathers as a request for spiritual food, for the needed nourishment of the soul day by day in its arduous pursuit of the righteousness of God. It was only later and very gradually that the reference to physical needs was admitted as an alternative, or rather supplemental, interpretation.

Now, it is when we consider this conception of prayer which Clement sets forth as the prayer of the Gnostic that we can see most clearly the element of mysticism which entered into his conception of knowledge. We may say that it was the knowledge, not of information, but of acquaintance, not the knowledge which, when given, remains merely in the memory as in a kind of impersonal storehouse and does not enter into and affect our inner nature, but the knowledge

which cannot be given without becoming a renewing and transforming element in our own nature and life. It is obvious that the knowledge of acquaintance is always of this latter kind, that we cannot know anyone intimately without absorbing into ourselves something of the intimate quality of his spirit ; perhaps I ought rather to say, until we have absorbed it. It is that unconscious chemistry of life, that mystic process of communication, that gives us our knowledge of persons. And our knowledge of God, in so far as it is real, is supremely of that kind. Yet Clement would not on that account have admitted that it was not strictly intellectual. To him it was the mind of man, the element of his spirit most free from the changing and inconstant movements of passion, the most detached and impersonal, or rather superpersonal, that could alone receive the communication of Divine grace and adequately turn it to account for the total growth of the spirit. It was the mind alone which could soar to those mystic heights of contemplation where good and evil might be perceived as God Himself eternally saw them.

CHAPTER III

S. JOHN CASSIAN AND THE BEGINNINGS OF MONASTICISM

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IN the last chapter I dealt with the beginnings of a systematic doctrine of prayer within the Christian Church. Naturally, that doctrine was derived from and founded upon the revelation of the nature of prayer contained in Holy Scripture. But we hardly, I hope, need to be reminded nowadays that the term "revelation," at any rate as applied to the Holy Scriptures, does not imply an exact and ordered system of doctrine. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews has most adequately described it as a Divine communication to the prophets "by divers portions and in divers manners," culminating in the still more immediate manifestation of His nature and His attitude towards men through His Son. There the personal and occasional character of revelation is exactly indicated. It is to His prophets that God speaks, to those who have the most intimate and intuitive feeling of the deepest needs of their own times and of how those needs may best be satisfied. And His perfected and inclusive revelation is through His Son, not through an exact and comprehensive statement of His

truth addressed to men's minds, but through the living presence and contact of His personal self in and with the spirits and the affairs of men. We may expect, then, to find in Holy Scripture materials for the construction of every doctrine of God and man and of their mutual relation, and to find those materials in inexhaustible abundance. But reflection upon these materials and their systematisation into exact doctrines are tasks reserved for the mind of man, working in such independence as we can at all predicate of that mind.

As we have seen, the formation of a Christian doctrine of prayer in a more or less systematic manner was first undertaken by S. Clement of Alexandria. I do not, indeed, forget or undervalue the almost contemporary attempts of Tertullian and Origen. But Tertullian's treatment, though valuable and interesting, is by comparison with Clement's superficial and rhetorical, while Origen merely continues or at most supplements his master. And in any case, it was Clement, and not either Tertullian or Origen, who left a permanent impress upon the further exposition of the doctrine. The next great stage in that exposition was reached just two centuries after Clement's time. At the end of the fourth and beginning of the fifth centuries prayer, as Clement conceived it, had become the motive and the nerve-centre of a great Christian economy of life. It was out of the increasing desire to make prayer, according to the Christian conception of it, a

reality that the monastic discipline arose. And it is significant that it was just in Egypt, the country most influenced by the Alexandrian theology, that monasticism first appeared. I do not, indeed, wish to suggest that early Egyptian monasticism owed anything consciously to a learned theology. It was as essentially a popular religious movement, entirely unsophisticated by theology, as was early Franciscanism or the Salvation Army in our own day. Nor do I forget that its appearance in Egypt rather than elsewhere was probably largely due to the accident that the Decian persecution was felt with peculiar violence in Alexandria and the Egyptian province. Yet it remains that the roots of early monasticism found their most favourable soil in Egypt. And the inference is not unwarranted that it was the popular and spontaneous expression of a type of religion which had its learned counterpart in the Alexandrian theology. Superficially the Gnostic of Clement and the hermit of the Nitrian Desert are poles apart. On a nearer inspection the outward contrast which they present will prove to be less important than their inward resemblance. However wide their differences, they agree in conceiving of religion almost exclusively as the life of prayer.

It will not be necessary for me to sketch, however hurriedly, the history of early monasticism. But I must at least try to show how a purely popular religious movement came to influence so widely the Christian literature of the fifth century.

As I have already hinted, the first impulse to the monastic life came from the stress of the Decian persecution in Egypt. The beginnings of monasticism date, therefore, from the mid-year of the third century. And it is to that year, 250, that the birth of S. Anthony, the chief figure of the early stages of the movement, is usually assigned. Whether the story of the flight of Paul the hermit to a mountain by the Red Sea, where he is represented as having spent the rest of his life in absolute solitariness, be legendary or historical, it is, at any rate, certain that during the twenty years which followed the Decian persecution many Christians left the cities and villages of the Nile Valley and lived the ascetic life in solitary huts which they built with their own hands in the deserts and mountains of Egypt. Somewhere about the year 270, Anthony, then apparently in his twentieth year, adopted this life, and seems to have maintained the régime of absolute solitude for a period of thirty-five years. This solitary hermit life, each recluse dwelling apart in his own cave or hut, was the first stage of monachism. But in the year 305 S. Anthony, impressed with the dangers of this purely solitary discipline, came forth from his cave and began to organise a common life for the numerous disciples that gathered round him. In this second stage the ascetics, or spiritual athletes, as they were called, lived in a kind of loose community, each member still inhabiting his own hut or cave, but all assembling twice a week, on the Sabbath

and the Sunday, for common worship in the church of the community. Somewhere about the year 320 a third stage was reached with the foundation at Tabennisi on the Upper Nile of the first Christian monastery in the modern sense. This development was due to Pachomius, whose Rule became the basis and model of all later monastic rules both in East and West, of all the rules which derive from S. Basil on the one hand and S. Benedict on the other. The fourth Christian century, which is pre-eminently for us the decisive period of conflict with the Arian heresy, is perhaps still more significant for the inner development of Christianity as the period during which monachism was rapidly spreading over the East, in Palestine, in Mesopotamia, in Asia, in Constantinople itself, and was preparing for its reception in the West both through Roman Africa, influenced by its local nearness to Egypt, and through traditional centres of Greek culture like Marseilles and its immediate neighbourhood. With the beginning of the fifth century, a whole century before S. Benedict, the monastic discipline had not only struck root in every Christian country, but—what is much more important—had won its way into all that was soundest in the heart and mind of Christendom. The very considerable literature which it inspired is certainly of unequal worth, but much of it, at least, must be reckoned among the finest spiritual treasure of the Christian religion. The great monastic centres of Egypt—Scete, the Nitrian Desert, the

Thebaid, Tabennisi—became places of pilgrimage for the devout from the remotest regions of Christendom. Theologians in the intervals of their lifelong warfare on behalf of the faith, great bishops driven from their sees by the political persecutions which were one of the incidents of the theological conflict, Christian scholars aware of inner needs which scholarship could not satisfy and sometimes even threatened to eliminate, great Roman ladies tired of outward greatness and longing for inner peace—all these from time to time sought the paradise of the desert. It is from their accounts that we have learned the history of that purposeful negation of history, of that vast and prolonged silence of the human soul. The excavator of our day is only now helping to break the spell of that silence. And perhaps it is his example that has renewed our interest in a literature which might have admitted us to its secrets long ago, but which the Christian historian has too long overlooked as hardly worthy of serious study. The reproach, however, is being rapidly removed. The labours of Dom Cuthbert Putler of Downside and of Sir Wallis Budge, to mention English scholars only, have concentrated attention upon this field of study and revealed both its importance and its fascination. But it is not, after all, the rather gossipy reminiscences of his ten years' life in the desert left to us by Palladius, Bishop of Helenopolis in Bithynia, friend and fellow-sufferer of S. John Chrysostom, in his *Lausiaca History*, nor the *Historia Mona-*

chorum, nor even S. Athanasius' Life of S. Anthony, nor the contemporary Lives of the two Melanias, nor the graphic account of Egyptian monachism contained in the first dialogue of Sulpicius Severus, that are most important for our immediate purpose. That distinction must be accorded to the Institutes and Conferences of John Cassian.

Cassian, though described by Gennadius in his continuation of S. Jerome's catalogue of great Christian writers as a Scythian, was far more probably a son of that land of Gaul, in which he permanently settled and to which he was the first to give a fully organised monastic system. While still quite young he resolved to adopt the life of a *cœnobite*, and in fulfilment of his purpose entered, with his friend Germanus, a monastery at Bethlehem. Cassian and Germanus, however, resolved to visit Egypt as the nursery of monachism and as the special home of its anchoritic variety. Having with difficulty obtained leave from the brethren of their own monastery, they paid two protracted visits, the first lasting seven years, to that country. They seem never to have penetrated so far as the Thebaid, much less to the district of Tabenna, but to have spent their time among the anchorites of the Delta, of the Nitrian Valley, and of the desert of Scete. Cassian's Conferences are his reports of conversations which he and Germanus held with some of the most celebrated of these anchorites on various aspects of the religious life. The part, however,

played by the two Bethlehem monks in these conversations is for the most part confined to asking questions and raising points of difficulty, while the main part of each Conference is a formal discourse delivered by the anchorite who is being interviewed on the special subject designated by the interviewers. As the Conferences were not reduced to their permanent literary form till some thirty years after Cassian's stay in Egypt, it is impossible to say how far they represent the actual opinions of the speakers to whom they are attributed, and how far those of the writer himself in the stage of intellectual and spiritual maturity at which he actually wrote them. But to us it is immaterial whether the discourses on prayer attributed to Abbot Isaac were actually spoken by him at some period between 380 and 400, or represent Cassian's own matured reflection on the subject somewhere between 420 and 428. The truth, no doubt, is that the form is Cassian's, and that the substance of the thought was common to both.

It was probably in the last year of the fourth century that Cassian left Egypt. Whether he returned to Bethlehem or not is doubtful, but if he did return he cannot have remained there long, as we next hear of him at Constantinople as an attached adherent of S. John Chrysostom during the years of persecution to which that saint was subjected through the intrigues of Theophilus, Bishop of Alexandria. Cassian was ordained deacon by Chrysostom, and was afterwards sent,

with his friend Germanus, by the clergy who adhered to their saintly bishop to convey to Pope Innocent a statement of the wrongs which Chrysostom had to endure. It would appear that Cassian must have remained some years in Rome, and was there raised to the priesthood by Innocent. It was, at any rate, in Marseilles that he permanently settled, and there he was inevitably called to the work of organising on the authentic Egyptian model, or at least in the authentic Egyptian spirit, the monastic institutes which were beginning to spring up throughout Provence. Cassian has, no doubt, been dwarfed by the greater fame of Benedict of Nursia, but he was almost as much the founder of Western monasticism as the great saint who gave to the West its perfected monastic Rule. The most hurried comparison of the Rule of S. Benedict with the Institutes of Cassian is sufficient to show how much the former owed to the latter. And Benedict generously acknowledged the debt when he enjoined upon the brethren of his Order the daily reading of the Conferences of Cassian. Those Conferences, indeed, have remained ever since they were written the classical authority for all writers on mystical theology and the classical guide for all who have attempted to follow the religious life. They have even, *mirabile dictu*, ensured their author from at least the extreme rigour of the *odium theologicum* under which he fell in his later years through his resistance to the exaggerated Augustinianism of Prosper and Hilary.

Like the chapters on prayer in the Seventh Book of Clement's Miscellanies, the two conferences of the Abbot Isaac may most adequately be described as a sermon, or a series of sermons, on the text, "Pray without ceasing." Cassian's conception, like Clement's, is that the life of the Christian must be a permanent and increasingly perfect prayer, if genuine and worthy acts of prayer are to be offered. Prayers are not real, they do not rise to God, if they are but incidental and occasional acts of a life which is not itself a constant and uninterrupted effort towards harmony with the Divine will. Abbot Isaac illustrates his teaching by a striking figure. "The nature of the soul," he says, "is not inaptly compared to a very fine feather or very light wing, which, if it has not been damaged or affected by any moisture falling upon it from without or entering into its substance, is borne aloft almost naturally to the heights of heaven by the lightness of its nature and with the aid of the slightest breath: but if it is weighted by any moisture falling upon it and penetrating into it, it will not only not be carried upwards by its natural lightness, but will actually be borne down to the depths of the earth by the weight of the moisture it has received. So also our soul, if it is not weighted with faults that touch it and the cares of this world, or damaged by the moisture of injurious lusts, will be raised as it were by the natural blessing of its own purity and borne aloft to the heights by the light breath

of spiritual meditation ; and leaving things low and earthly will be transported to those that are heavenly and invisible." The monastic rule, therefore, does not aim merely at the most frequent possible repetition of prayers. It aims primarily and before everything else at the formation of a constant and trustworthy character or inner habit of life, from which prayer will issue as its natural and spontaneous expression. Prayer, for Cassian and for the whole monastic ideal, is a discipline in the liberal ancient sense, not in the truncated modern one—that is to say, it is the generous or satisfying practice of the inclusive art of life, not merely the occasional acts of self-correction which may be contributory to that practice. That such acts are contributory and constantly necessary to the formation of the true discipline of life is one of the most universal certainties of our human experience. But they are not that discipline inclusively. They are, at best, but the clumsy methods by which we prepare ourselves for it, or by which we may hope to attain to a more careful, humbled, and sustained practice of it. Yet life, as we experience it, is not a clear-cut scheme of nicely regulated means and ends. The instrument is never merely an instrument which may be thrown away once the end has been achieved, and that chiefly perhaps because the end is never completely achieved. But that is not the whole account of the matter. In the chemistry of life there is nothing which is merely instrumental or merely final. If what

we call the instrument helps to achieve the end, the achievement of the end, however partial, of itself helps to perfect the instrument. Life is a great system of action and reaction in which everything may, in turn, play the rôle both of means and of end. This, of course, would not be so if the end of life were something outside it. But because the end of life is its own perfection, the achievement or recovery of the Divine image by which alone it can be at one with God, and because the means to that end must always be some inner effort, itself the product and expression of a Divine assistance, both means and end can interpenetrate each other as elements of the same vital movement. This Cassian abundantly recognises where he represents Isaac as saying, "Just as the crown of the building of all virtues is the perfection of prayer, so unless everything has been united and compacted by this [*i.e.*, by prayer] as its crown, it cannot possibly continue strong and stable. There is between these two a sort of reciprocal and inseparable union." In other words, if the perfect life constitutes the perfect prayer, it will never itself be perfected save through prayer.

Yet, while Cassian fully recognises this, he will not transact with those who would try to escape from the means by which alone the perfect rectitude and purity of prayer can be assured. He no doubt schematises overmuch, as we all do when we have to reduce the baffling interconnection of vital facts to exact statement. But his

schematism, after all, is needed to indicate the natural order of spiritual growth. "In order that prayer may be offered up," he says, "with that earnestness and purity with which it ought to be, we must by all means observe these rules. First all anxiety about carnal things must be entirely got rid of: next we must leave no room for not merely the care but even the recollection of any business affairs, and in like manner must lay aside all backbitings, vain and incessant chattering, and buffoonery; anger above all, a disturbing moroseness, must be entirely destroyed, and the deadly taint of carnal lust and covetousness be torn up by the roots. And so when these and such like faults which are also visible to the eyes of men are entirely removed and cut off, and when such a purification and cleansing as we spoke of has first taken place, which is brought about by pure simplicity and innocence, then first there must be laid the secure foundations of a deep humility which may be able to support a tower that shall reach the sky; and next the spiritual structure of the virtues must be built up upon them, and the soul kept free from all conversation and from roving thoughts that thus it may by little and little begin to rise to the contemplation of God and to spiritual insight." Now, that diagrammatic way of representing spiritual growth with its steady movement from point to point may seem to us almost fantastic. But Cassian is here recording the profound and general experience of those who have most con-

sistently striven to attain that growth ; and, poor as our own experience in this kind may be, I think we shall feel that the general sequence of experience is as he represents it. Before any kind of spiritual building, to use his figure, can be erected, we must first of all pull down the shambling structure which the natural self has hurriedly and almost by instinct thrown up for the comfortable housing and protection of its own loose and inordinate desires. We must, I say, pull down that structure and also clear away the encumbering rubbish which it will leave upon the surface of the soul, if we are ever to lay the rock-foundation of humility, of a genuine self-emptying for the sake of God. On that foundation alone can the structure of the true virtues which will assimilate us to God be raised. That is the ordered sequence which, in general outline, declares itself in all spiritual growth, even though, in fact, we find that long after the spiritual building has begun to rise we may be called upon to strengthen its foundations continually, and find, too, that like a mushroom-growth the loose structures of the passions which we thought we had demolished are rising up again and encroaching upon its air and light.

But it is unnecessary to press this point, for no men were ever more aware of the difficulty of the spiritual way and the deceitfulness of the human heart than the men who founded the various monastic rules. It was to help themselves and others to overcome the difficulties that they

formed those rules out of the very stuff of their own experience. And yet none knew better than they that no rules could ever be sufficient, just as no experience was ever exhaustive. The monastic life might, by its mere outward conditions, ensure against the grosser forms of temptation. But temptation found occasion by this partial interference with its free activity to assume subtler and, as the great spiritual writers are always insisting, more dangerous forms—more dangerous because less readily recognisable. It is on this account that the great masters of the spiritual life never grow tired of uttering their warnings against spiritual presumption, and of insisting on humility as the root of all virtues. Humility is for them the indispensable condition of the life of prayer, and the condition the most difficult of attainment. Humility is difficult because it is the complete unconsciousness of self. In trying to attain it directly, we must almost inevitably miss it. If we think we have attained it, we may be sure that we do not possess it. Humility conscious of itself is the negation of humility, is pride. There is danger in the very attempt to enjoin the virtue of humility, as we must all know from the unreality with which talk about it usually impresses us. Yet it is the virtue of virtues. And it was the supreme merit of monachism, not only that it recognised that, but that it prescribed the only rules which were at all likely to procure it as a fixed habit of character. It approached this great vital problem

indirectly. It framed a discipline of life which might unconsciously lead to the unconsciousness of self, the ἀπάθεια, which humility essentially was. That discipline consisted positively of work and prayer, negatively of obedience and abstinence from judgment of others. And all these together contributed to form the life of prayer. The Institutes of Cassian, the Rule of S. Benedict, are the formal exposition of this discipline. The Conferences of Cassian are a kind of inspired commentary upon it. Work, manual or intellectual work, constant, useful, interesting, or rather creating positive interests, is the discipline which the body as an instrument of the spirit needs, without which it will never become a healthy and obedient instrument of the spirit. Yet work must never be more than disciplinary. It must not create interests of its own which may become autonomous, and, instead of serving the spirit, encroach upon its domain. The limits of the disciplinary value of work are marked out by nature in the measure of its necessity. "Anything," says Abbot Isaac, "which goes beyond the necessities of daily food and the unavoidable needs of the flesh belongs to worldly cares and anxieties, as, for example, if, when a job bringing in a penny would satisfy the needs of our body, we try to extend it by a longer toil and work in order to get twopence or threepence."

Of the disciplinary value of obedience Cassian says less, though it is, of course, implied in his whole conception of life as subjected to a self-

imposed rule. But on the moral danger of passing judgment upon one's fellows he is especially insistent. The condemnation of others is always for him the sure evidence of laxity or partiality in self-judgment. Certainly one of the most pleasing traits of the monastic character at its best is its moral understanding and sympathy, its refusal to be shocked by the worst excesses of our human nature, its almost natural belief in the redeemability of the worst, its greater hopefulness of the victims of natural passion than of those who have yielded to the hardening delusions of spiritual pride. It is the surest evidence and ripest fruit of the self-knowledge which brings men and keeps them authentically near to God. The literature of spiritual monasticism is full of the most exquisite stories illustrative of this virtue—stories which I am afraid would often shock us by their apparent excess of readiness to tolerate the grosser forms of evil. Such stories do not, of course, express toleration at all, but a wise and just understanding and a belief that the evil which can be seen to be evil is less dangerous than the evil which can impose upon him who suffers from it and upon others as a form of good. The monastic attitude has here left a profound impress upon the common populations of the old Catholic countries, and it is the lack of this special stamp upon our national character that lays us open to the imputation of hypocrisy at their hands. They cannot understand how good people can be hard, how those who have learned

in their own experience the difficulties of being and of keeping good can be without a wise and just understanding of and sympathy for those who have been tragically overcome by those difficulties.

But the greatest element in the monastic discipline is prayer, just as the total result is the life of prayer. Work, obedience, genuine self-knowledge with its corollary of spiritual sympathy—or perhaps I ought rather to say, the practice of spiritual sympathy, which will aid self-knowledge and fortify self-judgment—these are already forms of self-mastery, and of almost unconscious self-mastery. They are the gentlest of hand-maidens leading us into the familiar presence of God. They are already forms of prayer training us towards the habitual contemplation of His perfection—which is also our perfection. There at last we are on the way to being delivered from the obsession of ourselves, to entering into the joy and freedom of the religious life. But of this state of contemplation I shall have more to say in succeeding chapters. I will only add now that, if the monastic institute was not equal to all the requirements of the progressive social life of man, if it unduly simplified the problem of living for God in this world, if it attempted to solve the problem by an artificial limitation of human activities and interests which could not endure, it nevertheless established firmly and with a practical permanence the spiritual conditions and principles which must always regulate men's attempt to live in communion with God.

CHAPTER IV

S. BERNARD AND MEDIÆVAL MONASTICISM



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IN the last chapter I dealt with the beginnings of the disciplinary system by which the Christian religion was to be exhibited and permanently shaped as the life of prayer. It was inevitable that, given the Christian doctrine of prayer, such a discipline should be attempted. But, given also our actual human nature and the historical conditions under which it has had to manifest itself, it was perhaps equally inevitable that the attempt should be only partially successful. We have seen how inclusive was the original discipline of prayer, how it provided for the activity of every side of our nature. Work, manual labour, was an integral portion of the discipline, and if there was no direct necessity to emphasise the part in it of intellectual labour, this latter was none the less assumed as an even more intimate factor in the life of prayer. Some kind of intellectual effort was of the very essence of prayer, was involved in the mere conception of it, and therefore did not need to be definitely enforced, while physical toil, as a disciplinary concomitant, did need to be assigned its exact place and measure in the total economy of the system. In the Rule of S. Benedict, for

instance, the 48th chapter is devoted to a regulation of the hours of manual labour for the different seasons of the year. The moral value of such labour is naturally insisted on first of all. "*Otiositas inimica est animæ*" (Idleness is an enemy to the soul's health). But the necessity of labour as the means of providing for the general needs of life is not only not forgotten, but is even given its place in the scheme of the religious life. In providing for extended hours of work, if necessary, at harvest-time, S. Benedict enjoins upon his monks that they be not saddened by the prospect—presumably of the shortening of the hours of prayer—since, he says, they are then proving themselves to be most truly monks when they live by the labour of their own hands, as their Fathers and the Apostles did. Incidentally, I may mention one general principle which S. Benedict introduces as governing all these labour regulations of his. It anticipates in a curious way one of the most debated features of modern Trade Union regulation. "*Omnia tamen mensurate fiant propter pusillanimes*" (Let all these regulations be applied with due regard to the capacity of the weaker brethren).

But this admirable sanity and equipoise of the primitive Benedictine Rule could not always be maintained. It ought, indeed, to be admitted, or rather definitely affirmed, that the central Benedictine tradition has maintained it practically unimpaired until this day, though manual labour has been largely replaced by that intellectual

labour for which the modern congregations of the Order are so justly famous. But from an early period in the history of monachism there was a growing tendency to segregate the contemplative and the active expressions of the monastic life. The rise of the Order of Mount Carmel may be said, I suppose, to have first brought out clearly into the open a tendency which had long been secretly at work. Yet the distinction between the contemplative and the active Orders, so familiar in later times, was of very slow growth. It was the work of S. Francis of Assisi, and more definitely of the Orders founded in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries for well-defined objects, like the Oratorians, the Jesuits, the Lazarists, and others, that gave a prominence which could not be ignored to a breach in the ancient tradition.

Still more important, however, for the purposes of our study than this growing division of labour within monachism itself was the almost inevitable appearance of a double Christianity, of two standards of Christian life: the integral Christianity of the cloister, and the diluted Christianity which could alone be looked for or achieved in the world. Work which had been chiefly a discipline in the cloister became in the world an organised interest encroaching in ever-increasing measure on all higher and deeper interests. An instrument only for the ideal Christian life, it tended more and more in the life of the world to become an end to which all other interests and activities were

subservient. In a way, the situation had to be accepted. The life of the cloister was becoming an offering of prayer for a world that did not and could not be expected to pray. That was a state of affairs which might well prove to be as bad for the cloister as for the world. There is no more dangerous delusion than that one man can pray for another in the full Christian sense of prayer. It is, of course, an elementary obligation of Christian charity, of the love which all God's human children owe to one another, to pray for others. But the furthest and highest effect of such prayer will be attained only when those for whom we pray, whether here or beyond the veil, have come to pray more perfectly themselves. For prayer in the full Christian sense is individual. It is, as I have so often insisted, the ascent of the whole personal nature to God. Our prayers for others may, and we offer them always hoping that they will, have the effect of awaking in them a stronger desire and purpose of achieving that *ascensio in Deum*. And it is beyond question that everyone who is in heart and mind ascending to God will desire with the full power of his spirit that all others should ascend with him, and will be ready to pledge all that is in him to secure, in so far as it can secure, that end. None the less, the dangers of this practical dichotomy of the Christian world into those who pray and those who are prayed for ought to be apparent. It is hardly necessary to emphasise the danger for the average Christian who has to

live his life in the world. His conception of prayer is inevitably reduced, for practical purposes if not in theory, far below the level of the full Christian conception. But there is danger, and grave danger, too, for the cloistered. For them, too, there must be present the ever-besetting temptation to degrade the conception of prayer to that of a magical instrument of salvation. Prayer needs, above all things, if it is to be kept pure, the test of action. And in prayer for one's own salvation that test is there, always ready to be applied. The man who is sincerely striving to lift up his life towards God in and through prayer cannot permanently deceive himself as to his own success. He knows whether his life as a whole is growing closer to the Divine will. Prayer can never be for him merely the expression of desire, however ardent and impassioned that desire may be. If his total activity, or rather the permanent set of character from which all his actions spring, is not increasingly accordant with that desire, his prayer is self-reproved. He knows of himself that it has fallen earthwards with broken wing. But the soul which in the cloister gives itself to prayer for the unconverted generally has no such test, and its prayer is surely in grave danger of becoming unreal and its very conception of prayer magical. The healthy reaction against such spiritual magic was provided by the active Orders which arose during the Counter-Reformation, in imitation of the Reform itself, which was, in its most essential and intrinsic aspect, a like

reaction against the same dangerous tendencies. The Reform demanded of the secular life that it should become the life of prayer in the fullest Christian sense. The Orders of the Counter-Reform refused to limit the sum of their Christian duty towards the evil or indifferent world to that of praying for it. They were founded with the one object of going out into that world to convert it, to teach its individual units how worthily to pray for themselves. That was a return to the higher conception of prayer, a revival of the due relation between the contemplative and the active aspects of the religious life.

Yet I would not exaggerate either the extent or the evil effects of their actual separation at any time. On the contrary, I would enter an energetic protest against the excessive way in which this separation has been represented. The fact rather is that, in the recurring periods of religious stagnation which have marked the history of the Christian as of every other religion, the religious life suffered as a whole, both on its active and on its contemplative side. And in periods of religious revival it recovered tone as a whole. Again, where the tendency to accentuate the one aspect or the other did manifest itself conspicuously, it was less from any essential loss of hold upon the true Christian conception of prayer than because division of labour is the natural result of every increase in the complexity of social organisation. And, as Christianity grew both in numbers and in depth of religious

feeling, the tasks to which it had to set itself and the organisation necessary to enable it to meet them grew in complexity also. In the present chapter I have selected for consideration one of those moments when the pressure of this complexity was most acutely felt. The earlier Middle Ages represented a great outburst of religious activity and zeal, and that in every department of the religious life. The revival of the Benedictine Rule through the Carthusian, the Cluniac, and the Cistercian reforms, the popular religious fervour awakened and sustained by the first Crusades, the intellectual earnestness and vigour of the precursors and the actual founders of Scholasticism, the rise of the mediæval Papacy—all these mark an epoch of unmistakable originality and greatness in the religious sphere. It is almost impossible to overestimate the religious greatness of the latter half of the eleventh and the first half of the twelfth centuries. I have chosen the central figure of that epoch to illustrate the application of the prayer-life to one of the most difficult tasks with which it has been confronted in the whole history of Christianity. I have chosen S. Bernard, because in him the religious life of that epoch was most conspicuously summed up. I might, indeed, in the Victorines, especially in Hugo and Richard, have found a more careful and profound treatment of the mystical aspects of prayer, though these are by no means wanting in S. Bernard. But it is in S. Bernard supremely that we can see the life

of prayer, the life gained through prayer, acknowledged, indeed acclaimed, by a torn and distracted Europe as its natural controller and guide. And with Bernard I would associate the friend he loved so well, Malachy, the only great man whom my own city of Armagh has ever produced—Malachy, who did for a still more distracted and barbarous Ireland all that Bernard did for Europe as a whole.

It is not, of course, my intention to sketch even in briefest outline the innumerable activities of Bernard. Suffice it to say that there was hardly a difficulty in the Christendom of his time in which his aid was not invoked. Popes, bishops, abbots, kings, all alike seemed anxious to constitute him a kind of unofficial court of final appeal for Christendom. And the impartial judgment of history must decide that the choice was more honourable to the conscience of his age than even to Bernard himself. For it was the recognition by a violent, selfish, and often brutal world of God's right to judge it; nay, more, it was that world's constant invitation to God to judge it. With all the warmth and tenderness of his loving heart, perhaps because of its warmth and tenderness, Bernard was the sternest and most implacable of judges. He would abate nothing of the rigour of the Divine law of justice in deciding the issues that were referred to him. He seemed determined to mete out the full measure of the Divine justice, as he saw it, with a special severity to those who were most closely bound to him by

the ties of friendship. He had done more than anyone else to establish Innocent II. on the Papal throne, in spite of the wiles of the usurper Anacletus II. backed by the powerful Roger of Sicily. Innocent's successor, Eugenius III., was an honoured member of Bernard's own Order of Citeaux and one of his most esteemed and intimate friends. Between Bernard and the great Peter of Cluny there was lifelong affection and respect. Yet this is the tone in which he writes to Innocent: "I speak boldly because I love faithfully. There is but one voice among our faithful bishops, which declares that justice is vanishing from the Church; that the power of the keys is gone; that episcopal authority is dwindling away; that a bishop can no longer redress wrongs, nor chastise iniquity, however great, even in his own diocese; and the blame of all this they lay on you and the Roman Court! What they ordain aright, you annul; what they justly abolish, that you re-establish. All the worthless contentious fellows, whether from the people or the clergy, or even monks expelled from their monasteries, run off to you and return boasting that they have found protection, where they ought to have found retribution." And when his beloved pupil and friend Eugenius III. ascended the Papal throne, here is how Bernard admonished him of his duty. He wants Eugenius to insinuate some gradual and practicable reforms—for he does not suppose that more stringent reforms would be immediately possible—into the adminis-

tration of justice in the Roman Courts, and he reminds him that "the ambitious, the grasping, the simoniacal, the sacrilegious, the adulterous, the incestuous, and all such like monsters of humanity, flock to Rome, in order either to obtain or to keep ecclesiastical honours at the hands of the Pope." The reforms which Bernard suggested may seem to us as we read them to have been mild enough, but it would have needed a spiritual dictator summoned, as he himself had so often been, by the outraged popular conscience to deal with a great emergency, to carry them through. It could hardly be expected that the president of the first Court in Christendom, bound by a long legal tradition and entangled in all the subtleties of the Canonists, would, with the best will in the world, succeed in effecting them. The present fashion of hearing causes, says Bernard, "is plainly execrable, and one which is unbecoming, I do not say to the Church, but even to the market-place. I, indeed, wonder how your religious ears can endure the pleadings of the advocates and the clash of words, which lead rather to the perversion than to the discovery of the truth. Correct this evil custom, cut off the tongues which talk vanity, shut the deceitful mouths. These advocates are they who have taught their tongues to speak lies, being eloquent against justice, and learned in the service of falsehood. They destroy the simplicity of truth, they obstruct the paths of justice. I would wish you, therefore, to decide on those causes which must

come before you carefully, yet briefly withal, resolutely avoiding vexatious delays." It seems, I have said, a mild suggestion. But it is not really so. It is practically a suggestion for replacing the impersonal process of law by a Divine dictatorship. And that is a dangerous experiment with us fallible beings of time. Better in the long run to endure the more or less of chicanery which is certain to accompany the application of any legal code whatsoever than to appoint a spiritual dictator whose succession we cannot ensure. Canon Law, like all other legal codes, was subject to evasion and might easily become, in the hands of a clever and unscrupulous Canonist, an instrument of even gross injustice. But it was none the less, in its flourishing period, the one security of freedom and of at least a balance of justice over injustice. At a given moment a spiritual dictator like Bernard might arise to arraign and even correct its abuses. But humanity cannot count on a succession of S. Bernards.

I have illustrated the frankness, amounting almost to *brusquerie*, of Bernard's dealings with his friends on the Papal throne. With his friend Peter, the head of the great rival house of Cluny, he dealt with a freedom bordering on harshness. A Cluniac monk had been elected by the chapter, in defiance of Bernard's expressed wishes, to the See of Langres and had received investiture at the King's hands. Bernard's objection was motivated by reports which had reached his ears

injurious to the moral character of the bishop-elect ; and though Peter, who, if anyone, ought to have known the worth of a member of his own house and Order, vouched in the most unequivocal terms for the high moral rectitude of the monk, Bernard persisted in his acceptance of the hearsay evidence which had reached him as an imperative ground for the cancelling of the election and the choice of his own nominee. And, strange to say, he prevailed—prevailed, as it must seem to an unbiassed judgment on the evidence before us, against the requirements of strict justice. Whatever the strict merits of the case may have been, Bernard persuaded everyone concerned of his single-mindedness, his honesty, his fearlessness, his unswerving loyalty to what seemed to him the best and highest. It was always so that he impressed men, and therein lay the secret of his power over them. It need not surprise us, though it probably will, to learn that his determined and passionate opposition to Peter's wishes in the matter of the bishopric of Langres did not abate by one iota the tenderness and depth of Peter's affection for him, that his frank denunciation of the abuses of the Roman Court only helped to bind the successive occupants of the Roman See more closely to him. It is the highest tribute that can be paid to Bernard's influence. But surely it is a still higher to the moral soundness of an age which could not only accept, but invite, such castigation of its vices and other excesses.

Such was S. Bernard's outward activity. The

power which generated it, the native source of inner life from which it flowed, is what it behoves us most to consider. To indicate that power I cannot do better than quote the words of one of his more recent English biographers, Mr. Cotter Morison. "The central impulse of his being," he says, "the springhead from which flowed the manifold streams of his public acts, had no necessary connection with the outer world of men and events. He was, by intention and inclination, a prayerful monk, doubtful and anxious about the state of his soul, striving to work out his salvation with fear and trembling here on earth. The highest good he knew of, the ideal of Christian faith as he had been taught it—this was what inflamed his heart, nerved his will, and braced his energies of mind and body to the extremest tension. To him and to his contemporaries, this ideal was realised in the life of a pious monk. And a pious monk it was his desire above all things to be. That he failed to obtain the perfection at which he aimed, no one would have been more ready to acknowledge than himself; but that he also succeeded better than most, is the almost concurrent testimony of after ages." That is the judgment of a biographer who was certainly not lacking in due sympathy, but still was religiously detached, as Mr. Morison was not a Christian but a Positivist. It is all the more noteworthy that he has caught the real secret of S. Bernard's extraordinary influence. It was not in spite of, but exactly because of, his being

a monk that he exercised such power over the distracted counsels of the outer world of his time, and that that world felt the need of his power. The world was becoming just Christian enough to experience a conscious need of guidance by the prayer-life of the cloister. And the cloister on its side had begun to listen to the world's call. It could no longer be satisfied to pray for the world. It needed now to pray with it and in it, to teach it to pray with that full Christian prayer which is life self-uplifted towards God.

It is the revelation of power in the prayer-life that this historical figure and influence most conspicuously represents. But our subject requires that we should seek also to learn from him what he can teach us about the nature of prayer, how he and his time at their best conceived of it. It is not, indeed, to S. Bernard among the men of his time that we would most naturally turn for such information. For he was not a thinker in any exact sense of the term, and though he wrote much, his style—which is always the most adequate witness to a writer's intellectual habit—is rather that of a rhetorician than of a thinker. He was a preacher, a letter-writer, and an occasional pamphleteer. Yet there is much that is most precious, that is indeed beyond price, for the mystical theologian in the four huge volumes of the Benedictine edition of his works. And it is interesting to find occasional exact parallelisms in the treatment of certain mystical subjects between Bernard and the most consider-

able mystical theologian of his time—Hugh of S. Victor. Hugh was a mystic who continued the old intellectualist tradition in theology which took its rise in S. Clement. As a mystic, he necessarily thought of contemplation as the highest achievement of the soul, as the consummation of the ascent of the mind to God, as the full realisation of prayer. But as an intellectualist, he had also to account for the lower stages of the mind's upward progress towards God. I know of no writer who makes the mediæval attitude towards spiritual things, with its peculiar intellectual bias, more intelligible than Hugh of S. Victor. We must wonder sometimes why the mediæval Schoolmen, and especially those of them who were pure mystics, attached such value to the intellect as a religious instrument. Why, we are inclined to ask, should the contemplation of God Who is love and Who is known through love require any preparation through ordinary knowledge? Love is unique, independent of all knowledge save that of the person loved. And then that kind of knowledge which is indispensable to the love of God, the personal knowledge of God, is itself unique and independent of all other kinds of knowledge. Moreover, it is directly revealed to us in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is the way in which our minds work about this question. But such considerations would have seemed altogether too meagre and inadequate to the mind of a Schoolman. He would, of course, have admitted that the perfect

and inclusive revelation of God's nature was given to us in His incarnate Son. But he would hardly have admitted that that revelation, in its fulness, was capable of being directly apprehended. What the Incarnate Life of God immediately revealed was God's infinite love towards men, and in a general way His will of righteousness manifested in the costingness of the Son's obedience. But all the detail of the Divine will in its claim of righteousness from men it was a duty imposed upon men themselves to learn more and more perfectly by continual reflection upon God's ways in the world, in this actual universe of time and space. To the mediæval Schoolman the ordered universe was the revelation of the thought of God, and the patient study of that universe was a gradual entrance into the mind of God, and therefore into the requirements of His changeless will. It is only necessary to read S. Augustine's treatise on Order to realise this, and to appreciate the general view which he left as a heritage to the Schoolmen. We have to remember that for the Middle Ages the sciences which deal with the constitution of the physical universe were not independent. They did not, as they do for us, yield a knowledge independent of all spiritual values. The physical universe lay within the totality of the spiritual, and it was studied for the sake of the light which it could throw upon the nature of the spiritual. But this study of the universal order had its various stages through which the mind of man must pass in its ascent to the full

contemplation, the perfect vision, of the spiritual. These stages Hugh of S. Victor described as thought, meditation, the lower contemplation and the higher contemplation (*cogitatio*, *meditatio*, *contemplatio naturalis* and *contemplatio mystica*). Thought is the mind's initial acquaintance with the ideas of things. That power of abstraction from the separate things presented in sense, of forming universal ideas out of an immediate sensible perception of things, was already a first step in the ascent towards the perfect knowledge of God. It helped us towards a recognition of the Divine order and harmony and of its nature. The next stage, meditation, Hugh describes as "the assiduous and sagacious revision of cogitation which strives to explain the involved and to penetrate the hidden." Then comes contemplation, "the mind's perspicacious and free attention, diffused everywhere throughout the range of whatever may be explored"—such contemplation first of the creatures, the ordered creation, and finally of the Creator. But perhaps it is by allowing Hugh to use the imagery by which he delights to illustrate his thought that we may see most clearly how for him there is only one field of knowledge, and how within that field we ascend from the most elementary knowledge of the natural to the sublime and perfect knowledge of the supernatural, of God. "In meditation," he says, "there is a wrestling of ignorance with knowledge; and the light of truth gleams as in a fog of error. So fire is kindled with difficulty

in a heap of green wood ; but then, fanned with stronger breath, the flame burns higher, and we see volumes of smoke rolling up, with flame flashing through. Little by little the damp is exhausted, and the leaping fire dispels the smoke. Then the conquering flame, darting through the heap of crackling wood, springs from branch to branch, and with lambent grasp catches upon every twig ; nor does it rest until it penetrates everywhere and draws into itself all that it finds which is not flame. At length the whole combustible material is purged of its own nature and passes into the similitude and property of fire ; then the din is hushed, and the vivacious fire having subdued all, and brought all into its own likeness, composes itself to a high peace and silence, finding nothing more that is alien or opposed to itself. First there was fire with flame and smoke ; then fire with flame without smoke ; and at last pure fire without flame or smoke." That surely is a very wonderful image of the ordered and gradual ascent from our confused effort to apprehend the order of things visible to the clear vision of the invisible God.

Now S. Bernard, as I have said, was a far less exact thinker than his contemporary, Hugh of S. Victor. But as a child of his age he, too, held Hugh's view of the necessity of the lower stages of thought to the mingled intellectual and spiritual ecstasy of contemplation. Only, what Hugh called "meditation" Bernard described as "consideration." In the treatise on Con-

sideration which he addressed to his friend and disciple Eugenius III., he thus distinguishes the lower and the higher : "Contemplation may be defined as the true and certain intuition of the mind regarding anything, the sure apprehension of the true ; while consideration is thought intently searching, or the mind's endeavour to track out the true." There, you see, is Hugh's meditation, the painful wrestling of ignorance with knowledge, and his contemplation, "that acumen of intelligence which comprehends all with clear vision." And for Bernard, as for Hugh, the cross of consideration or meditation is the way to the crown of contemplation or clear and ecstatic vision.

Yet, it may be asked, what contribution can the intellect make, which is at all necessary, to the supreme act of contemplation, to the communion of the soul with God in prayer? Now, the answer to that question contains the very essence of what I have called the Christian conception of prayer, of the conception which Bernard had inherited from all the great Christian doctors who had preceded him. All true and worthy prayer implied as its condition as exact a knowledge as possible of the Divine will and an intention of absolute submission to the Divine will. But the easy presumption of such knowledge was the supreme danger which he who would pray rightly must avoid. No text of Holy Scripture was more frequently on the lips of every doctor who treated of the subject of prayer than

that saying of S. Paul, "We know not what to pray for as we ought." It was more and more exact knowledge of the Divine will which was necessary to genuine growth in the power of prayer, to the true development of the prayer-life. And the desire to pray more worthily required of him who was possessed by it a diligent and sustained effort to know the Divine will more adequately. I will conclude this chapter by a quotation from one of S. Bernard's sermons which will illustrate his mind upon this point. "Let the man who would pray faithfully beware lest he ask for things which ought not to be asked for, or ask with too great importunity for those things which may be asked for, or seek lukewarmly those things which ought to be sought always and with the whole heart. 'Ye seek and do not receive,' says James, 'because ye seek amiss that ye may spend it on your pleasures.' So does every man who seeks earthly things beyond the measure of strict necessity, or who clamours after worldly glory or pleasure. Such also are those petitions which certain lay folk are accustomed to offer when they pray for the death of an enemy and other like things which are not convenient. Temporal goods, if they are lacking, may indeed be asked for, so far as human necessity requires: but, according to the judgment of the blessed Gregory, even they are not to be asked for with an urgent importunity. In this kind also are to be included those spiritual gifts (without which, none the less, salvation

cannot subsist), such as the word of knowledge, the grace of healing, and, in short, all things of which we have no certain knowledge that they are expedient for us. For instance, if you are wearied out by temptation, you may indeed pray that it be taken away from you, yet not too insistently, since in such things it behoves us always to remember the apostolic saying, 'We know not what to pray for as we ought.' But these are the things which are to be asked for always and with the whole heart. These are the things for which your desires may cry aloud to God continually and with all possible insistence—that you may gain the benediction of His grace, that you may be pleasing in His eyes Who is righteousness itself, that you may live in Him and die in Him, that you may earn the right to behold His glory and to enjoy Himself for ever. For it is of these things that it was said, 'Pray without ceasing.' "

CHAPTER V

S. JOHN OF THE CROSS AND SPANISH
MYSTICISM IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

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IT would be difficult to conceive of a more striking contrast than that presented by the period with which we were dealing in the last chapter and the period which has now to be considered. The age of S. Bernard was not only an age of religious unity. It was an age when religious unity was a prevailing instinct and had become a settled habit. It was an age when religious unity was not imposed by any external authority, but was the result and expression of an internal harmony. The society which is characterised by such harmony has within itself a vital principle of authority. In it authority has as yet no need to assert itself, to call attention to, or vindicate, its claims. It exists diffusedly as, and with, the general consent of its members. Now, there are two characteristics about the religious society which possesses this diffused authority, both of which are conspicuous in the Church of the early Middle Ages. The first is a clear recognition, shared in alike by its official rulers and by those whom they rule, of what the society stands for, of what that life-principle is which has ultimate

and supereminent authority within it. And the second is the large freedom, claimed by the members of the society and admitted by the society in its members, in giving effect, according to their capacity, to the objects for which the society stands. The mediæval Church was a society pronouncedly characterised in both these ways. No member of it, from the Pope to the humblest layman, doubted that its prevailing purpose was to extend and deepen Divine justice among men. Its official authority had its sanction in the general belief that it was invested with a Divine *charisma*, or special grace, for the more effectual procuring of that end. Every offender against the Divine justice in Christendom bowed himself in the end before that authority and recognised its judgment as the just sentence of an outraged and offended God. But if that official authority at any time clearly failed in the fulfilment of its function, if it failed to render justice or was reasonably suspect of conniving at injustice, it was not only open to the reproof of those whose superior sanctity gave them the clear right to reprove it, but, further, it usually accepted that reproof and often canonised those who administered it. We have seen with what freedom Bernard reproved even zealous Popes like Innocent II. and Eugenius III. for tolerating abuses which it would have been impossible for any but the strongest to remove—and they were not strong—and how as long as they lived they invited a continuance of that faithful dealing from the humble monk. And

a whole century after S. Bernard we have the instance of that terrible indictment of the Papal Court in a sermon preached before Innocent IV. at Lyons by our own Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln. More than a century later still there is again the holy boldness of that poor uneducated Italian peasant woman, Catherine of Siena, who did more than anyone else to release the Papacy from the Babylonian captivity of Avignon before she died at the age of thirty-three. In the Middle Ages it was the saint, the man or woman marked by conspicuous zeal for the triumph of the Divine justice, who spoke the final and decisive word in the ears of Christendom. He or she, however humble in station, though often, as in the case of S. Catherine, wholly uneducated, was invested with a Divine authority, questioned by none, acclaimed by all, to indict official authority when it became false to its Divine mission and to recall it from its practical apostasy. We grievously misread the story of the mediæval Papacy when we ascribe its strength to the slavish submission of an ignorant Christendom to its arbitrary decrees. Its real strength lay in its own ultimate submission to a judgment pronounced by the humblest voice in Christendom, if that voice was clearly the utterance of a life inspired by the Divine wisdom and holiness.

But all this had changed by the dawn of the sixteenth century. The highest official authority within the Church had grown weak by its own defection from the Divine ideal which it repre-

sented. It had wantonly forfeited the confidence and respect of the Christian multitudes. The universal belief in the mission of the Church as an instrument of Divine justice and in its official authority as supremely entrusted with the application of this justice to human affairs—this same belief, I say, which had once held up the Papacy to the high level of its duty, was now ebbing away into a total despair both of its willingness to recognise and of its competence to fulfil that duty. More than a half of Christendom had risen in open revolt against it. Of that revolted section considerable portions had already, by the middle of the sixteenth century, organised themselves into independent societies as the sole hope of preserving the Christian ideal of the Church. If the remainder was to be retained or recovered to the Papal allegiance, it was clear that the Papacy itself must be reformed. That was the work of the Counter-Reformation, which actually recovered the Latin countries with parts of Southern Germany and Poland to the Roman obedience. But this very notable success was accompanied by an almost complete reversal of the characteristic attitude of the mediæval Church. The ideal at which it aimed supremely was sanctity, and its unity was the spontaneous result of its universal respect for that ideal. The post-Reformation Church, on the contrary, was forced to concentrate upon unity as the ideal to be achieved, and it came more and more to be taken for granted that this enforced unity would

secure and guarantee sanctity. The supreme authority which had centred for each Christian generation in its own best lives was now transferred to the official leadership which could ensure and maintain at least an outer unity. The generous measure of freedom which in the Middle Ages accompanied the general recognition of a constitutional authority, had now become a danger to be most jealously guarded against, and was replaced by an unquestioning submission to official authority identified more and more with immediate Divine authority.

The reforming movements which wrought this enormous change were naturally of very various degrees of religious value, but it may be admitted at once that they were all alike inspired by a more or less authentic religious zeal. Some of them, however, and notably the activities of the Society of Jesus, were occasionally characterised by a spirit of intrigue which recalled and accentuated the worst features of political action. So long as the ideal which the Church held before the world was primarily that of sanctity, it had to convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment. But when it came to subordinate that ideal to the ideal of unity, it was almost inevitably led to trust more to circumventing the world, to dealings with it in its own spirit. It is impossible to ignore, as it would be gross partiality to condone, this quasi-political element in the otherwise genuinely religious reform which the sixteenth century effected in both the separated sections

of Western Christendom. But it would be equally unjust to exaggerate it. And it is with one of the aspects of the Counter-Reform which was utterly free from it that we have now to deal.

The Order of our Lady of Mount Carmel is perhaps the last surviving witness to a view of history which was once universal among Christian apologists, but which most of us have long since outgrown. S. Augustine, for instance, held that the Church, which assumed an independent existence under the Apostles, had already existed in the Synagogue, and had even preceded the Synagogue through the line of the Patriarchs, and through Noah, Enoch, Abel back to Adam. So the Order which first emerges upon the field of European history at the beginning of the thirteenth century traced its origin to a mysterious race of solitaries dwelling in the recesses of Mount Carmel who kept alive, during the hundreds of years which preceded the Advent of Christ, the monastic Rule of Elijah, Elisha, and the Prophets. And not content with this ancient lineage of the Spirit, they even claimed that the Rule of their Father Elijah ultimately derived from Enoch. Among the adherents of this ancient Rule were the Rechabites and the Essenes and S. John the Baptist. After a long underground existence during the three centuries of repression or persecution under the Pagan Empire, the rule once more appeared, controlling the lives of the solitaries of the Egyptian deserts, and was reformulated in the Rules of Pachomius and Basil. The Rule

of Pachomius is therefore, in reality, the Rule of Elijah or even of Enoch. And if it be asked how such a tradition can be in any sense Christian, the question only reveals a very naïve forgetfulness of the significance of that conception of history which we have seen in S. Augustine. The Rule of the prophet Elijah was Christian because he himself was a Christian, because he and all the Prophets were the secret depositaries of the revelation made later in and through the Incarnate Lord. Nay, in the mysterious cloud upon Mount Carmel in which "the Lord was not," there was vouchsafed to the prophet the dim vision of the Blessed Virgin, who lingered over the holy mountain for nine hundred years, giving special protection to its solitaries until the coming of her Son in the flesh.

Now, it is in no spirit of idle curiosity that I recall these peculiar claims of the Carmelites. Nor is it to direct against them the scornful shafts of the historical critic, as the Jesuit hagiologists did two hundred years ago. It is because they reveal better than the most careful analysis of it the temper of mind and heart in which S. Teresa and S. John of the Cross, the sixteenth-century reformers of the Order, set themselves to their work. Their work, like that of the other Orders which then arose or were re-formed in that section of the Western Church which remained true to the Roman obedience, was, of course, to counter the activities of the schismatic national Churches and heretical sects which were springing

up on all sides throughout Western Christendom. But they set themselves to the common task with a difference. They did not, like the clever Jesuits, forge for themselves a complete armour of secular learning in which they might meet on equal terms a world that was growing accustomed to the use of new intellectual methods. They did not even propose, like the Oratorians, to meet the needs of the new time by training a more capable priesthood, nor, like the Lazarists, to carry a mission of spiritual enlightenment and social reconciliation among the derelict masses of the ignorant and the destitute. They trusted absolutely to the revival of the interior life, by the restoration of the ancient discipline of prayer, to which alone they ascribed all the permanent victories of the Christian religion. There, as I think, they were really meeting the Reform on its own ground, far more effectually, perhaps, than the clever devices of the Jesuits enabled them to meet it. What the Reform aimed at doing, and for a time in large measure succeeded in doing, was to introduce the prayer-life into the world and under the conditions imposed upon men by their ordinary secular avocations. In condemning the cloister and fleeing from it, it unconsciously proceeded to re-establish the cloister in the very thick of the world-life. Wherever the Reform succeeded religiously, in English Puritanism, in German Pietism, in Calvinism almost universally, it was by applying the discipline of the cloister, most of its abstentions and refusals

(marriage, of course, excepted), and its one absorbing interest of prayer or Divine meditation, in and to the conduct of world-affairs. The Reform has succeeded religiously just where and just in proportion as it has formed groups of cloistered communities within the circle of the world's activities and out of the ordinary human stuff determined by those activities. Where it has not succeeded in doing that, it has failed religiously. The Churches of the Reform, I would say, have never been Churches in the traditional Christian sense at all. They have been at their worst national State departments for maintaining a minimum of religious observance within the nation, and at their best religiously disciplined groups reproducing the cloister in the world. S. Teresa probably thought little, or thought not at all, of this latter characteristic of the Reformed sects. To her they were no doubt nothing more than so many new heresies. None the less, it was by a true instinct that she set herself to counter their activities by a revival of the most ancient and the most rigorous of monastic rules. Not the clever appeal to, and manipulation of, the superficial religious instincts and prejudices of the world to which the Jesuits resorted were needed to correct so great an aberration as the Reform must have seemed to her, but the revelation of what the prayer-life could be at its best.

Now, if it was through S. Teresa that the contemplative life was in practice restored in all its ancient rigour, it was through her fellow-worker

and disciple S. John of the Cross that the theory of the prayer-life as thus revived was most fully and indeed brilliantly exposed and illustrated. There is nothing probably in all Christian literature at once so vivid and profound in its insight into spiritual states as the saint's *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and *The Dark Night of the Soul*. They have become, indeed, the classics of the modern religious psychologist. I do not deny that many of the experiences which the saint describes must seem morbid to us ordinary people. But no one can ever quite mistake the accent of sincerity in the account of experiences the most unfamiliar to himself. And it is this accent which no one can ever miss in S. John of the Cross. He, we feel, has passed through these experiences which he describes, however strange they may seem to us: and he has achieved through them a finer spiritual strength and sanity. I do not propose however, to dwell upon what is most strange and occasionally fantastic in these experiences of a soul. What is strange in the mere form of the conceptions is due probably to that indifference to exact history, to that acceptance as history of a quite fantastic combination of past events and connection between them, which we have seen in the Carmelite account of the origins of the Order. But one of the most interesting things about S. John of the Cross is his rooted distrust of those visions and revelations which the mystics, as a rule, set such store by. S. Teresa herself was the constant recipient of such revelations, in

the form both of visions and locutions—*i.e.*, things presented to the inner eye and the inner ear with the same degree of vividness as if they had actual form and sound, though in fact they have neither. Yet this devoted disciple of hers disparages all such revelations and reproves any trust in them. To him it seems that there is no guarantee of their divine or against their diabolic origin. "I hold," he says, "the desire to know things by supernatural means as much worse than the desire of other spiritual pleasures that come through the senses. For I do not see how the soul which would gratify this desire can acquit itself of at least venial sin, even though it have many good intentions and be in a high state of perfection. And I would say the same also of him who commands a soul to seek this gratification or consents to its doing so. For there is no necessity for it whatsoever, seeing that natural reason, the commandments, and the doctrine of the Gospel are sufficient for our guidance: nor is there either difficulty or trouble which we cannot solve or remedy by means of these, with much enjoyment of God's favour and profit to the soul. Besides, we can gain so much profit and true service to our souls from reason and the doctrine of the Gospel that even though, whether with or without our will, certain things may be supernaturally communicated to us, we ought to receive only that which is conformable to reason and to the Gospel law." It would be difficult to insist more strongly on the dangers of taking our own

pious fancies or emotional experiences for Divine revelations, and on the necessity of some objective standard of truth by which all unusual movements and experiences of the inner life may be tested. No one certainly ever believed more fully than S. John in the inner light or lived more consistently by its guidance. Every word of his bears the impress of a genuine spiritual originality. He is always appealing to experience, his own profound personal experience, in attestation of the truth which he would commend to others. There is nothing barely traditional, merely handed on as a current coin guaranteed by the stamp of some authoritative mint, in all his teaching. Yet the inner light is for him no occasional illumination of exalted interior states of feeling. It belongs to the deepest and most permanent centre of our spiritual being. It is the life of conscience patiently proving itself against an objective revelation of the Divine will, against what is already most certainly and most universally known of that will, that gradually learns to apprehend that will more deeply, fully, personally, that gradually receives fuller illumination as to its nature and bearing upon the circumstances of our own life. S. John's was a mysticism in which authority and freedom were exquisitely blended. They did not merely exist side by side, as it were, in his spiritual life, each ready to act as a check upon any possible excesses of the other. Each rather proved itself in his experience necessary to the other's growth. The free movement of

his spirit was rooted in the threefold authority of natural reason, law, and Gospel, and its healthy life was preserved in due submission to that authority. Yet, on the other hand, that authority would have been an inert and lifeless thing if the free life of conscience had not, like a germinating seed, fed upon its inner substance and thus given it a new and independent existence. Authority suffers by being merely accepted and submitted to. Freedom suffers in escaping the due restraints and corrections of authority. It is always the temptation of the mystic to ignore or be impatient of this great law of the spiritual life, to abandon himself absolutely to the unregulated movements of the inner life and accept them as the unmediated direction of God. That so great a mystic as John of the Cross, rich in experiences of the soul which by their strangeness and intensity at once dazzle and terrify us, should nevertheless have perceived this danger so clearly and so consistently exposed it, is enough to place him among the very sanest of the masters of the spiritual life.

It is natural, therefore, that we should find the imprint of this sanity upon all his teaching about prayer as the main sustenance and support of the life of the spirit. We must, I think, be occasionally surprised at the continual insistence upon the necessity of mental prayer and the comparative depreciation of vocal prayer which is so characteristic of the sixteenth and seventeenth century revival of the prayer-life. To us it seems impossible to separate the two, or rather it seems

impossible to regard mere words as prayer at all, unless through them the mind and spirit are ascending with a full authentic consciousness of effort towards God. Now, it is true that the mystics, even the sanest and most deeply and steadfastly spiritual among them, do hold definitely that prayer has never approached its due perfection until it can, or rather must, dispense with words and has become a rapt and sustained contemplation of the Divine will and nature. Yet I think that much of their depreciation of vocal prayer was motived only by the knowledge of how easily the continual repetition of prayers in the ordered life of the cloister might empty those prayers of all content. What was really meant often by the slights cast upon vocal prayer may be gathered from these words of S. Teresa : “ As far as I can understand, the gate by which to enter this castle [the interior life] is prayer and meditation. I do not allude more to mental than to vocal prayer : for if it is prayer at all, the mind must take part in it. If a person neither considers to Whom he is addressing himself, what he asks, nor what he is who ventures to speak to God, although his lips may utter many words, I do not call it prayer. Sometimes, indeed, one may pray devoutly without making all these considerations because one has practised them at other times. But the custom of speaking to God Almighty as freely as with a slave—caring nothing whether one’s words are suitable or not, but simply saying the first thing that comes to

the mind from being learnt by heart by frequent repetition—cannot be called prayer. God grant that no Christian may address Him in this manner !” The burden of S. Teresa’s complaint, it is sufficiently apparent from these words (and indeed she often states it in still more express terms), was that the real life of prayer had died out of the cloister, and that just because the routine of prayer had been there so sedulously preserved without sufficient regard to the interior discipline which could alone ensure its true quality. The whole object of her reform was to restore to the cloister the true idea of prayer, to give effect to the apostolic injunction, “Pray without ceasing,” to attune the heart and mind to a constant intercourse with God and uninterrupted dependence upon the Divine will, to make God the constant background of all the activities of life. Teresa, at least, did not depreciate the value of vocal prayer in so far as it was the real momentary expression of the soul’s constant prayer-state, though, of course, she held that that state was most surely manifested in the gift of contemplation.

Now, the spiritual lore of S. John of the Cross, in so far as it relates directly to prayer, is concerned almost entirely with the habitual preparation of the soul for its acts of prayer. In the forefront of this preparatory discipline he places what all the great mystics, and among them the English Quakers, have been wont to call “waiting upon God.” That is to say, the soul must lose

its natural instinct of virtually dictating to God the conditions under which He is to speak to it. It must be willing to bare itself, to become independent of its ordinary spiritual attachments, whether natural or acquired. It must learn to sit loose to the self-chosen preferences of spiritual custom which it is inclined to regard as necessary to its intercourse with God. It must learn to let God speak to it as He will in the natural occasions of life. S. John's castigations of this religious self-will and conceit are perhaps too remote from our own religious habits to be easily appreciated by us. He says, for instance, that there are people who think that God will not hear them except at a particular altar, unless a certain number of candles are lit upon it, unless such and such ceremonies and postures are observed and practised, and each in its due place and manner, even unless such or such a priest says the Mass. They think, he continues, that if one point is missing from the customary rites, God has not heard them, nor has the service benefited them in any degree. Such childish wilfulness he characterises as a blasphemous dictation to God. It is blasphemous, because it is a virtual offering of the worship which we owe to God to those things which He Himself has appointed as the dispensable means and instruments of our approach to Him.

But still worse and more to be condemned as a misunderstanding of the nature of prayer is the habit which such people have of, as it were,

putting God to the proof. They expect as a result of what S. John calls their “ ceremonial and superstitious prayers ” to feel some effect which will assure them that the object of their request will be granted. This, he says, “ is nothing else than to tempt God and so gravely to displease Him that He will at times allow the devil to deceive them, by making them feel and purpose things very far from their soul’s profit. And this they deserve by reason of the attachment and self-love which they retain in their prayers, desiring rather that success may be granted to their own special aims than that the will of God be done.” What S. John of the Cross would make us feel is that the over-eagerness to look out for an exact answer to our prayers is sure evidence that they have not been true and worthy prayer. Such an attitude reveals to ourselves the fact that we have been serving God for reward. It is once again the doctrine of S. Thomas : “ It is clear that he does not pray who, far from uplifting himself to God, requires that God shall lower Himself to him, and who resorts to prayer not to stir the man in us to will what God wills, but only to persuade God to will what the man in us wills.”

Once more, we find S. John of the Cross repeating almost in identical terms S. Bernard’s enumeration of the things which ought to be sought always and with the whole heart in contrast with the things which we must ask for only with the condition—*if they are according to the*

will of God, since we can never know whether such indifferent things are according to His will or not. What we must always pray God for is the purification of conscience, and the sincere and steadfast intention to seek always those things which are necessary to our eternal salvation, to seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. If that desire so occupies our hearts as to control the whole character of our outward action, the whole inner habitude of our lives, then we know that we are praying aright. And then all those other things that may be necessary for us, and in the measure in which God sees that they are necessary, He will give to us without our asking for them. The petitions which are alone worthy of the prayer-life and necessary to it are petitions for its own growth, for the desire and power of lifting up our lives to God increasingly in the integrity of their motives, their purpose, their action.

CHAPTER VI

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ON March 12, in the year 1699, Pope Innocent XII. issued an Apostolic Constitution by which he condemned Archbishop Fénelon's *Explanation of the Maxims of the Saints on the Interior Life*, as containing propositions (of which twenty-three were expressly detailed), "temerarious, scandalous, ill-sounding, offensive to pious ears, pernicious in practice, and even erroneous." The Pignatelli Pope is known to all students of English literature as the real hero of Browning's poem, *The Ring and the Book*, the man who fearlessly pronounces God's judgment on that human monster, Count Guido Franceschini, the murderer of his child-wife Pompilia. In Browning's poem the aged Pope records the popular estimate of himself as already, at the moment when he is called upon to pass judgment on the guilty Guido, "one of well-nigh decayed intelligence." True, he nobly belies that estimate by his part in the sordid drama of Arezzo as Browning pictures it, yet he is himself aware that he stands not "off the stage" indeed, but "close on the exit." Yet it was on the night of February

21, 1698, that he condemned the murderer. It was more than a year later, when the time of his exit was still nearer and in fact only a few months distant, that he condemned the man who, if never formally canonised and perhaps now never likely to be, deserved that honour more than very many who have been admitted to the roll of the Church's saints.

Yet I do not wish to suggest that it was only because of some decay in Innocent XII.'s powers of judgment that Fénelon was condemned. There were certainly other reasons for that condemnation, less natural and pardonable. It was immediately the result of an intrigue, the motives of which were even more political than theological. But theological motives there were, the validity of which is not to be discredited beforehand by the two years of unworthy intrigue which were needed to give them effect. The truth is that in this judgment the Church was unconsciously yielding to the requirements of a definite, though I admit not then clearly realised, deflection of her interests and consequent policy. I must try, as briefly as I can, to indicate what I mean. Let me begin by drawing attention to a strange significance in the fact that in the last quarter of the seventeenth century we should have the first instance, so far as I know, of prayer, the very heart and centre of personal religion, being made the matter of an ecclesiastical decision. The inner life, the personal experience of a Divine intimacy with the soul, is the impregnable stronghold of

religious freedom. Every great historical religion has been forced to admit and to honour that fact. But none has admitted it more ungrudgingly, and honoured it with a fuller sense of its importance for the depth and reality of religion itself, than Christianity. We have seen, in the course of our enquiry, how, so long as Christendom continued to be a spontaneous unity, the saint, the specially holy person, fulfilled in it the rôle of a kind of court of final appeal. Official authority recognised, and even on occasion required, the guidance of a purely spiritual authority higher in kind than itself. All the institutional elements of religion were fully aware of their merely instrumental character. And not only so, but they were most ready to admit that their instrumentality was in some sort dispensable, that there were occasions when God communicated directly with the soul and wrought in it greater effects than were wont to come through the ordinary course of their functioning. There has, indeed, always been in the Church of the West much liberty of prophesying. It has gone even to excessive lengths in giving a kind of official sanction to all sorts of strange revelations, if only behind them there was the guarantee of a conspicuously holy life.

Nor did the sixteenth-century breach in Christendom put an immediate term to that state of affairs. It was too much an ingrained religious habit and attitude to disappear lightly. Both in the Reform and in the Counter-Reform it persisted

in slightly different guise, alongside another movement in both towards the exaltation of official authority. The mystical type of religion which centres in the prayer-life continued to flourish, especially in Rome and in Lutheranism. In Calvinism, indeed, owing to the rigour of its external discipline, mysticism was much less at home, and was forced to find its opportunity in creating independent sects like the Quakers and Moravians. It is, however, with the Churches which remained true to the Roman obedience that we are now principally concerned. There, as we have seen, the Spanish Church, if it produced the Society which became, and indeed was by intention from the beginning, the great bulwark of official authority, produced also the Reformed Carmelites under S. Teresa and S. John of the Cross, and innumerable mystics of the same type, like S. Peter of Alcantara, Louis of Grenada, John of Avila, and Louis of Leon. And this latter seems to me the more characteristically Spanish type of religion and the more permanently influential upon the religious life of the later Roman Church as a whole. At the beginning of the seventeenth century it appeared in France, with the natural French modifications of what I may describe as a greater religious *politesse*, in S. Francis de Sales and his disciple S. Jeanne de Chantal. S. Francis, who died in 1622 at the age of fifty-five, exercised a quite incalculable influence upon French religion during the whole of the seventeenth century. "He brought back devo-

tion," says Bossuet, "to the secular world : but do not suppose," he continues, "that he disguised it to make it more agreeable to the eyes of the worldly. He brought it clothed in its natural dress, with its cross, its thorns, and its sufferings." Or, again, there is as evidence of the charm of his religious influence over his own and the next succeeding generations that fine and evidently heart-felt saying of S. Vincent de Paul : "The Bishop of Geneva was the Gospel talking to us." One noteworthy result of the influence of S. Francis and his introduction of the interior life into the secular world was the great vogue in seventeenth-century France of the spiritual director, the reinforcement and indeed practical supersession of the purely official function of the confessional by the more intimate guidance of souls through spiritual direction.

S. Francis, then, may be said to have translated the spiritual dialect of S. John of the Cross into French. Religion in the sternness, the aloofness, the almost harsh detachment, native to the spiritual habit of the Spaniard, without losing any of its essential quality, takes on the charm, the winningness, the irresistible sympathy which are the peculiar heritage of the French genius. Now, what S. Francis did at the beginning of the century, Fénelon did towards its close for another Spaniard. I am well aware that no Roman Catholic theologian who has a special reverence for Fénelon will easily tolerate any attempt to derive any aspect of his teaching from

the Molinistic doctrines which were condemned in 1687 by Pope Innocent XI. with such circumstances of ignominy and reprobation. Nor do I forget that no theologian of the time laid so sure a finger upon what was most certainly erroneous in the condemned propositions attributed to Molinos as did Fénelon. Yet outsiders like ourselves are not compelled by deference to the decisions of an alien authority to shirk the full force of the facts as they stand. And the facts are these. Of the sixty-eight propositions condemned by Innocent XI. as Molinism, not one of those which may be justly regarded as antinomian or immoral in tendency is to be found in any published work of Molinos. The works which were published by him, the *Spiritual Guide* in 1675 and the *Brief Tractate* in 1681, were approved by five theologians, four of whom were Consultors of the Holy Office. The five were the Archbishop of Reggio, the Minister-General of the Franciscans, two successive Generals of the Carmelites, and a distinguished Jesuit theologian of the Roman College. Further, Molinos was admitted to the friendship of Innocent XI. himself, and was the close friend and confidant of the deeply devout Cardinal Petrucci, Bishop of Jesi, and of innumerable other spiritually-minded persons in Rome. And again, when two Jesuit theologians of eminence first impugned the orthodoxy of the writings of Molinos and Petrucci, even though their criticism was marked by much moderation, it was their censure and not the object of it which

was condemned *absoluté* (without reservations) by a decree of the Holy Office. Finally, the *Spiritual Guide* is there for all to read, and to any reader who is at all familiar with the earlier mystics, and especially with the sixteenth-century Spanish mystics, it discloses the fact that the author continually but reiterates, sometimes in hardly different language, the most characteristic teaching of S. Teresa, S. John of the Cross, S. Peter of Alcantara, S. Francis de Sales, and S. Jeanne de Chantal. It can be read in English, translated by the late Mrs. Arthur Lyttleton, and furnished by her with an introduction which certainly leaves nothing to be desired in the way of appreciation and of personal gratitude for the spiritual assistance she has found in it. Now, it is not possible to enter here upon any enquiry as to the reasons for the sudden and dramatic change by which the most popular religious figure in Rome became, without any change in his teaching or attitude, the object of its condemnation. It may, however, be permitted to quote for what it may be worth the contemporary explanation of our own Bishop Burnet, who was in Rome during the trial of Molinos. He says that the chief motives behind the indictment of Molinistic Quietism were to be found in the fact that, though the Quietists "were observed to become more strict in their lives, more retired and serious in their mental devotions, yet they were not so assiduous at Mass, nor so earnest to procure Masses to be said for their friends ;

nor so frequently either at Confession or in processions, so that the trade of those that live by these things was sensibly sunk." And perhaps I may conclude this bald account of a strange and painful episode in ecclesiastical history by quoting the judgment on the whole matter of one whose knowledge is almost unparalleled in its range and its closeness to detailed fact, and whose critical temper is impartial in the highest degree and sharpened to the finest edge of conscientiousness—I mean the Roman Catholic scholar, Baron Friedrich von Hügel: "The cruel injustice of many details and processes of the movement against the Quietists—a movement which soon had much of the character of a popular scare and panic, in reaction against a previous in part heedless enthusiasm—is beyond dispute or justification."

Now, no one will question the direct influence of Molinos or of the group of mystics whose doctrine was shaped by the movement inaugurated by him—Petrucci, Falconi, Malaval—upon the famous Mme. Guyon; and it was Mme. Guyon, as everybody knows, who drew Fénelon into the Quietist controversy. It was in 1687 that Molinism was condemned. It was in 1688 that Mme. Guyon, just forty years old and already the author of her famous book, *The Short and Very Easy Way of Prayer*, first came into contact with Fénelon. She was at that moment in the highest possible favour with all that was most devout in the great world of Paris. She became

for a time the chosen spiritual guide of that little devout court which Mme. de Maintenon maintained at Marly as a spiritual refuge from the worldliness and distractions of the great Court of her husband, Louis XIV. For some five years, indeed up till the year 1693, her influence in devout circles seems to have been unchallenged. Then suddenly, as in the case of Molinos, the storm burst. The scrupulous and somewhat conventional piety of Mme. de Maintenon was alarmed by what seemed to her excessive and immoderate in the new type of devotion which was spreading everywhere, especially in her own religious foundation of St. Cyr. And her alarms were accentuated when she found that her own spiritual director, Godet de Marais, the Bishop of Chartres, a theologian of some eminence, was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the doctrine involved in the new devotion. Bossuet's aid was invoked by Mme. Guyon herself and at Fénelon's suggestion for an examination of her writings. After a long process, into the details of which I need not enter, certain positions which were considered dangerous in *The Short Way of Prayer* were condemned at the famous Conference of Issy. Mme. Guyon, while denying that what was erroneous in these positions was to be found in her writings, nevertheless made her submission, and the affair might have seemed at an end. But that was far from being the case. One of those who had taken part in the Conference of Issy was Fénelon. He had the more

readily assented to the decisions of that Conference because he honestly held that there was something excessive and blameworthy in the form of Mme. Guyon's statements, and also because its decisions were couched in positive rather than negative terms, were formally an assertion of true and authorised doctrine and only by implication a condemnation of what might be erroneous in Mme. Guyon's teaching. But on further reflection he felt that loyalty both to his friend and to the truth as he perceived it demanded that he should establish more clearly the traditional Christian doctrine about prayer to which Mme. Guyon's writings, with whatever pardonable excess, had witnessed. To this end he published, in 1697, his *Maxims of the Saints*, to which Bossuet replied in his treatise on the states of prayer. Reply and counter-reply followed over a space of two years, throughout which time a process to procure Fénelon's condemnation was being pushed at Rome by Bossuet's agents. Till the last moment the affair was in doubt, the Pope himself being personally friendly to Fénelon and assured of the essential orthodoxy of his doctrine, and always eager to effect, if possible, some compromise which might avert an open condemnation. One of Bossuet's agents, the Abbé Phéliepeaux, testifies that on March 4, 1699, eight days only before the brief was issued, the Pope was "so irresolute and terrified that he sent him [Phéliepeaux] to the President of the Holy Office to entreat him to consider seriously,

as in the presence of God, to what he was committing the Roman Church.” Unnecessary to say, the pathetic appeal of the aged Pontiff had no effect, and Phéliepeaux, writing to Bossuet, does not conceal his amusement at the old man’s scruples of conscience any more than his exaltation at the firm stand of the Holy Office which he himself, by long-continued intrigue and misrepresentation, had done so much to inspire. Yet Innocent XII.’s scruples were well founded. In condemning Fénelon, the Roman Church was almost wantonly breaking with its most uniform and most respectable, nay, its most sublime, tradition—the tradition of its mystics, its unbroken tradition as to the nature, the motive, and the perfection of prayer. The condemnation was not easily obtained, and it is hardly possible to believe that it was obtained on the merits of the actual questions then submitted to the judgment of the Holy Office. No, there were deeper questions at issue to procure that condemnation—questions which could not be produced in any court, questions whose importance had hardly yet emerged into full consciousness in the Church’s mind, questions which were as yet only silently at war in her own constitution. Already at the end of that seventeenth century the Church was beginning to be haunted by the dangers of her own ancient freedom, to be coerced by an inner necessity which she could not escape into asserting and buttressing her authority by any and every means. She had begun to suspect

even every free movement of her own inner life, however ancient and however necessary to her true spiritual character and function, as a possible challenge and menace to her official authority. Bishop Burnet was, no doubt, a not very sympathetic witness. We may even admit that he was a very prejudiced one where the Roman Church was concerned. But his shrewd observation at the time of the Molinos trial was probably not very wide of the mark. In all these condemnations with which we have been dealing, the Church was just beginning to yield to a fear which in the old days of her more vigorous life she could never have entertained—the fear that her authority was being endangered by her own inner spiritual freedom. The first symptoms of old age were creeping in upon her, and old age tends normally to become at once the fear of life and the fear of losing it. It shrinks from the further adventure of living, and it hardens itself instinctively against every threat of dissolution. It distrusts freedom, it accentuates bare authority.

I would not, however, be understood to assert simply that there was no excuse for the intervention of authority in these high matters. In proportion, indeed, to their importance was the necessity imposed upon sufficient authority of safeguarding their adequate statement. And that the statement of them contained in the mystical writers was often excessive and perhaps erroneous few modern persons would be inclined to deny. But what does need saying, almost

without qualification, is that the defects of statement to be found in the new mystical doctrine arose for the most part out of the beliefs which were shared with the mystical writers by those who judged them ; and, further, that those same defects appear in the writings of the earlier mystics which had been fully approved by the Church. Let me indicate more fully what I mean by such defects. In most mystical writers there are to be found continually accounts of immediate Divine revelations to them which they regard as simply miraculous. So altogether fantastic and bizarre are some of these stories that the ordinary man yields to his initial prejudice against the abnormal and refuses them all further credence or even consideration. They seem to him the confessions of the insane. Now, this conception of the simply miraculous character of those phenomena was shared in alike by those who had experience of them and by the official Church, or at least was generally accepted by the official Church without demur or reproof. And to some degree both the mystics and the official Church were right here as against the ordinary sceptical intelligence. The experiences to which I refer were by no means marks of insanity. They were often the vehicles of a quite extraordinarily sane and profound realisation of the Divine will. What could be more fundamentally sane than the wisdom of, say, S. Teresa or S. Catherine of Siena—a wisdom applied most fruitfully to practical affairs and yet derived, so at least these

saints were most fully assured, from revelations of a miraculous character? S. Catherine, for instance, held conversations with her Divine Lover for many years before the vision in which our Lord placed the ring of mystical espousal upon her finger. Yet she was never free from the fear that these communications might be a ruse of the enemy, and here is how her Lord gave her assurance in the matter. "I will teach thee," said the Voice she heard in her heart, "how to distinguish My visions from the visions of the enemy. My vision begins with terror, but always, as it grows, gives greater confidence; it begins with some bitterness, but always grows the more sweet. In the vision of the enemy the contrary happens, for in the beginning it seems to bring some gladness, confidence, or sweetness, but, as it proceeds, fear and bitterness grow continuously in the soul of whoso beholds it. Even so are My ways different from his ways. The way of penance and of My Commandments seemeth harsh and difficult in the beginning; but the more one walks therein, the more does it become easy and sweet; whereas the way of the vices appears in the beginning right delightful, but in its course becomes ever more bitter and more ruinous. But I will give thee another sign, more infallible and more certain. Be assured that, since I am Truth, there ever results from My visions a greater knowledge of truth in the soul; and, because the knowledge of truth is most necessary to her about Me and about her-

self—that is, that she should know Me and know herself, from which knowledge it ever follows that she despises herself and honours Me, which is the proper office of humility—it is inevitable that from My visions the soul will become more humble, knowing herself better and despising her own vileness. In the visions of the enemy, the opposite happens; for, since he is the father of lies, and king over all the children of pride, and cannot give save what he has, from his visions there ever results in the soul a certain self-esteem or presumption on herself, which is the proper office of pride, and she remains swollen and puffed up. Thou, then, by ever examining thyself diligently, wilt be able to consider whence the vision has come, whether from the truth or from the lie; for truth always makes the soul humble, but the lie makes her proud.” There is a whole treatise of moral theology of the rarest quality, and a quite extraordinarily true and illuminating knowledge of the human soul, given in that inner experience of S. Catherine. That it came to her as the revelation of a moment, as a Divine locution heard at a definite moment of time and in a definite place, is the accident of her special apprehension of it. What matters to us is not that, but its essential truth. We honour the mystics, not because of their abnormal mode of receiving Divine truth, but because they did so often receive it in an unmistakably fuller and richer degree and of a rarer quality than do we ordinary people. And just because the truth

which they apprehend as to the soul and God and their living relations with each other is of this altogether higher and richer quality, we are compelled to regard it as given to them by a Divine inspiration which we must speak of as supernatural. But by supernatural we mean not a supersession and replacement of natural human processes, but an infinitely larger and fuller penetration of them by Divine power. And, again, when we speak of those who have attained to such truths as inspired, we do not mean that they have suspended, as it were, all natural effort of their own to seek God and allowed His Spirit to energise their inert and merely expectant faculties, but rather that it is because they seek Him more constantly and earnestly and with an intensified spiritual action that they are able to receive the universal movements of His Spirit towards us men with an infinitely greater fulness. The one conception of inspiration and revelation may be called miraculous, and it was common to all Christians till quite recently. The other, which a more accurate psychology forces upon us, we may call, in contradistinction to the miraculous, supernatural. And it is interesting to find that Baron von Hügel, in a recent address to members of the University of Oxford on "Christianity and the Supernatural," claims that in the controversy between Bossuet and Fénelon on the states of prayer, in which, of course, Bossuet was charging upon Fénelon the guilt of excessive statement, it was Bossuet who was really guilty and

Fénelon who was free from guilt in that regard. "Fénelon," he said, "towards the end, insisted against Bossuet (who found downright miracle in the more advanced states of prayer and of self-surrender) that the entire spiritual life, from its rudimentary beginnings up to its very highest grades and developments, was for him (Fénelon) essentially and increasingly supernatural, but at no point essentially miraculous."

What I want specially to insist on is that in all this controversy there was no ultimate disagreement as to the nature and perfection of prayer. Bossuet admitted as fully as Fénelon himself that prayer was essentially what S. Thomas had described it, an "*ascensio mentis in Deum*." Indeed, I cannot remember in all Christian literature a more scathing condemnation of the popular degradation of prayer into a blasphemous and superstitious attempt—I am not going beyond Bossuet's own characterisation of it—to make God the instrument of our own interested desires, than is contained in a sermon of his on devotion to the Blessed Virgin. And, again, he admits as freely as does Fénelon that the perfection of prayer is to be found in those extraordinary states experienced by the mystics in which the soul seems so to be absorbed into the Divine will as to lose all sense of separateness of desire and purpose. Where difference did really arise between them was in the question of the motive of prayer. That was the nerve of the Bossuet-Fénelon controversy. And here again, remem-

ber, what was nominally in dispute was the question of interpretation. Good Catholic theologians both of them, they accepted fully the tradition of the elders and contended only as to how that tradition might most correctly be interpreted. They were, no doubt, more or less consciously deceiving themselves there, for even in interpreting others we necessarily betray our own predilections. And it certainly was so in this case. Bossuet was the last person in the world to reduce or accommodate Christian doctrine. But he was, after all, the theologian of common sense. He had the French seriousness, but he had also the French distrust of enthusiasm, and he was utterly free from the sentimentality which in the French nature so often takes the place of enthusiasm. If, theologically, Bossuet was far from Jansenism, he had much of the spiritual temper of the Jansenist. To him the motive of prayer on which Fénelon insisted as not only the highest but the only ultimately worthy motive seemed a mere illusion. That motive was the pure, disinterested love of God, such love as could transcend, and in its perfection must transcend, even the desire of our own salvation. Now here there can be no doubt that Fénelon was more correctly interpreting the real tradition of the saints. Bossuet's argument from the very beginning of his instruction on the states of prayer, in spite of its extraordinary acuteness and force, labours under a difficulty which he can never successfully evade or over-

come. The weight of tradition is against him. He has continually to admit that it is only by benign interpretation that the actual words of those whose authority in this matter the Church had consecrated can now be accepted. It is a strange rôle to which this most redoubtable champion of tradition finds himself condemned—that of continually explaining away the clearest statements of tradition. Whether Bossuet was right or not in his contention that we cannot love God save in so far as we love our own salvation, that we cannot desire God's will to be done save in so far as we directly and consciously conceive of that will as implying our own salvation, it is at least quite certain that he is not supported by the authorities he is compelled to accept and professes to interpret. It is useless for him to labour, as he does continually, the point that the Divine will necessarily includes our salvation. None of the saints or the mystics ever denied it, because it is undeniable. Nor did they deny that ordinarily the desire of our own salvation enters into our every thought of God, our every prayer to God. But, at the same time, they asserted, and asserted out of the experience of their own souls striving to be and to remain true to God, that love is not love unless it is completely disinterested, that to love God is to love His will for its own sake ; to love it because, however it may affect us, it is the supreme and utterly satisfying good ; to love it therefore, as it were, independently and in complete forgetfulness of

our phenomenal selves and of all the immediate instincts, prejudices, requirements of those selves. It was, they asserted, in that transcendence of self, however difficult to attain, that one became aware of real communion with God. That disinterested desire that the Divine will should prevail was the only wholly pure motive of prayer, and could in some sort be recognised as a motive even by the simplest soul. And with the saints that pure love of God which utterly transcended the thought of self was no mere devotion to some shadowy ideal of perfection, even if Divine. It could be warm with the love of all creatures. If it could transcend the conscious thought of one's own salvation, it could embrace also the passionate desire for the salvation of others, the self-offering for their sake. "How could I be content, Lord," cries S. Catherine of Siena, "if any one of those who have been created in Thy image and likeness, even as I, should perish and be taken out of my hands? I would not in any wise that even one should be lost of my brethren, who are bound to me by nature and by grace. Better were it for me that all should be saved, and I alone (saving ever Thy charity) should sustain the pains of Hell, than that I should be in Paradise, and all they perish damned: for greater honour and glory of Thy name would it be." The expression may seem to us fantastic, but the substance of the thought and feeling is abundantly real, and true to our highest spiritual instincts. Fénelon felt the reality, and dared not

conceal his witness to it. He recognised the love "that seeketh not its own" as alone worthy to be offered to God and alone worthy of man at his best to offer. Bossuet instinctively shrank from such experience as fantastic and unreal, and thereby proclaimed himself the lesser soul.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS—PRAYER AND THE MODERN WORLD

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THE doctrine of prayer whose history has occupied us throughout these chapters has, it must be admitted, had much less influence in shaping the popular conception and practice of prayer within practically all the Christian Churches than its great and constant authority would have warranted us in expecting. Some enquiry into the reasons for this comparative failure seems forced upon us. Well, in the first place, there is the broad fact—sufficiently attested by the comparative study of religion—that in all the higher religions there is a tendency to retain, almost unaltered, some of the most primitive conceptions and usages. Magic itself, which nearly all competent students of comparative religion now regard as distinct both in character and origin from religion, has nevertheless been converted to religious uses, and persists in some form and degree in even the most spiritual religions. And in prayer especially the most primitive and the most spiritually developed types of idea and practice may subsist side by side, even within the same soul. In prayer we are all, or ought

all to be, children, or at least to preserve some of the childlike simplicity of spirit. And the simplicity of the child or of the childlike means not so much an absence of complexity of motive as an absence of the feeling that motive is or can be complex. To a child symbol and reality are almost one. That is a fine touch of Goethe's where he makes the evil spirit whisper in Gretchen's ear as she kneels in the great Cathedral overborne by remorse :

“ How otherwise was it, Gretchen,
When thou, still innocent,
Here to the altar cam'st,
And from the worn and fingered book
Thy prayers didst prattle,
Half sport of childhood,
Half God within thee.”

Halb Kinderspiele, halb Gott im herzen. In the prayer that rises from the most ignorant heart, if only that heart has kept its simplicity and childlikeness, there may be something which is hardly distinguishable from belief in magic, something of the child's confusion of values, of its wilful confidence in an unreal world shaped by its own imagination. But there is also in it some witness to God's presence in the heart. The childlike always pray better than they know. Even when some bitter need in them cries almost wilfully for its self-determined satisfaction, even when some poignant grief in them seems to dictate, as it were, the manner of its consolation, it is, after all, God that they are really seeking for and that

they really find. For God can, and does, inspire to genuine prayer the secret, unconscious depths even of the heart that in its surface consciousness clings most tenaciously to its own illusory sense of the satisfaction it needs. To deny all this would be the merest religious pedantry. Yet it remains that growth in prayer means an ever surer insight into what is most certainly God's will for us, an ever stronger desire for those gifts of His own nature which cost us most to receive and to utilise, an ever readier acceptance of the unavoidable hardness and sternness in the conditions of our life as the discipline we somehow need.

But assuredly the principal reason for the perversion or degradation of the Christian conception of prayer among us is a more respectable one than the habit ingrained in all of us to import something of a magical element into our religious belief and practice. It is nothing more or less than the difficulty of realising the conception of prayer which we have been considering in the changed circumstances of our lives and with our changed outlook upon life. The same difficulty did not present itself to the inhabitants of the cloister. It was at least possible for them to lead the prayer-life. They had so arranged all the outer circumstances and conditions of their existence as to make them an intentional, and in fact most efficacious, discipline for the life of prayer. For us, on the contrary, amid all the distractions of the world, caught up in the meshes of its innumer-

able interests and activities, it is immeasurably more difficult to make prayer the central and controlling principle of life. Almost in spite of ourselves, prayer becomes for us a discontinuous series of acts inserted as by a kind of spiritual violence into another series of acts which is practically continuous, and which is, besides, of a quite different and apparently conflicting order. The question which we are forced to ask is whether the quality of prayer must necessarily be reduced by this enlarged variety of world activities. But before attempting an answer to that question, and by way of giving more cogency to our answer, we must first put two other questions. Was the monastic simplification of life necessary to the religious life conceived of as the continuous life of prayer? And, even prior to that, was the monastic limitation of human interests and activities permanently possible?

Now, in considering this last question first, I will assume that man's life is governed not only by instinct, but by reason also. For if man were governed by instinct only, and in so far as he yields only to instinct, there can be no doubt that any and every artificial limitation of his interests is impossible. His expanding capacities will always demand free room for their exercise. It is only our reason that, condemning some exercise of our instinctive capacities as hurtful or prejudicial to interests which we hold to be supreme, can and will restrain the lower capacities and interests. Now, in the immense widening of human interest

and effort which has marked especially the later Christian centuries and has been most evident in Christian countries, we must see, I think, not merely the blind impulse of instinct, but the considered verdict of approval by the Christian reason. We do not hesitate, indeed, to speak of Christian civilisation, which is only another name for this enlargement of human interests and activities during the Christian era and among the Christian peoples, as proof positive and sufficient of the religious supremacy of Christianity. Somewhat summarily, as I think, we adjudge secular progress to have been the accompaniment and result of religious superiority. Personally, I am far from attributing to that more or less accidental coincidence of the two in history the religious significance which many Christian apologists so unhesitatingly assign to it. But it does at least prove that the Christian reason has affirmed its belief that the permanent limitation of human interests is not only actually, but morally impossible, that it would involve necessarily some diminution and curtailment of man's full spiritual life. And if here the Christian reason has answered correctly, it is clear that the other question which I put is answered also. If the possibilities of richness, depth and fulness in the spiritual life are enlarged by the widening of our interests and activities, then the artificially simplified economy of the monastic life is not permanently necessary to the prayer-life even as Christianity conceives it. For that prayer-life is

just the spiritual life at its richest, deepest, fullest.

We are free, then, to consider our original question, which was: Must prayer be reduced from a permanent spiritual state to a discontinuous series of acts by our immersion in world-affairs? Clearly our answer must be an unhesitating "No." Otherwise the widening of our interests will not prove to be that spiritual gain which we just now claimed that it could become. And at first sight it certainly seems difficult to find that promise of spiritual gain in widened interests with the multiform activities which they entail. It is in concentration, intensity, and the limitation which they ordinarily involve, that we usually and rightly look for strength. But, after all, concentration does not always involve limitation of interest. However wide the circle of interests, if they are all being compelled towards the common centre, there is concentration. And the wider the circle, the more difficult certainly, but also the more enriching, is the work of concentration. The discipline involved in subjecting all our varied interests in the open field of our modern world-life to the one central interest of making God's will prevail is infinitely sterner than was the ancient discipline of the cloister. It is, of course, easier to evade it. The temptations to refuse it are infinitely greater. But for him who would take the service of God seriously, it is the discipline imposed by the conditions of our modern life. Let us take a concrete instance, and to

make it as typical as possible let it be that of a man, as we say, "*in business.*" The very phrase—with its passive preposition—is significant, for it indicates from the beginning the very limited measure of control which the man has over his own activities. He may or he may not have founded his own particular business, but whichever be the case, he finds that that business of his is related to a vast business world, that it is part of a huge world-organisation which is quite independent of him, which existed before and will exist after him, and yet within which his own personal success or failure must be decided. Now, it is clear that his success as a business man will depend upon something more than concentration on his own special and limited sphere of labour. Mere hard work will not be sufficient. His work must be also intelligent. He must try to understand how his business affects, and is affected by, the general world of business. And in proportion to the breadth and suppleness of his intelligence, he will then come to see his own special business in its relation to an ever-widening series of business interests with which indeed he has no immediate concern, but whose success on the whole means his success and whose failure his failure. His work, therefore, cannot afford to be a mere blindly exclusive concentration on his own immediate business interest. It must include also an intelligent harmonisation of that interest with all the larger and wider business interests beyond it with which it is connected.

It is, of course, always possible for the clever rogue or for the deliberately self-centred person to turn this larger intelligence of his entirely to his own personal account. He can choose some specially favourable moment to promote his own particular interest by sacrificing and defrauding the known claims of the general interest. But suppose he is a man of conscience. Then he will seek more and more to place his own interest in its due relation to all the other interests with which it is normally related, and ultimately to the general and inclusive interest of a humanity founded on righteousness and increasingly seeking righteousness. He will not need to sacrifice wholly any one interest, even the smallest, even that of his own immediate material success. But he will seek to give each interest its due measure, and he will find that that involves a supreme and always primary concentration upon the highest and most general interest. He will have discovered, almost unconsciously, the secret of the ancient wisdom : " Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."

And what is that concentration upon the supreme and general human interest but what the ancient masters of the spiritual life meant by prayer ? They conceived of the constant spiritual state which they called prayer as consisting of two stages, which they named meditation and contemplation. And though they sometimes spoke of those stages as if they were successive, as if it were necessary

to pass through the one in order to reach the other, and as if when the higher had been reached the lower was definitely left behind, yet they more generally and more wisely recognised that the two stages might be simultaneous, and that for their due contribution to the life of prayer they ought to be so. Now, what they meant by these two stages in the life of prayer may be very simply defined as the anxious and constant effort to know God's will and the loving recognition of, and delight in, that will. That is what all men need to-day, as always, for the right living of their life in the world. Behind and right throughout all their activities they need the beneficent action of the life of prayer as the salt which will keep those activities pure and life-giving to humanity. And there alone, within their activities, will prayer become real. There alone will it be first meditation, an anxious and constant effort to learn what God's will is. We can never learn God's will *in abstracto*, in some spiritual void exhausted of the authentic effort of our human will. It is only inside our work that we can learn it truly and realise all the cost that that learning involves. And there, too, alone, within our work, can we find the spontaneous delight and satisfaction there is for man in doing the will of God, in serving that higher ideal good which is the very stuff of man's eternal life, which gives him the sure earnest of it here and prepares him for the more abundant entrance into it hereafter. We may perhaps feel that this doing of

God's will as it must be done in our modern world looks strangely different from what the old Christian monks meant by the doing of His will. But in substance there is no difference. They, too, felt strongly and earnestly insisted that only within work inspired by the spontaneously unselfish will could prayer, the uplifting of the heart to the Divine service, subsist. Let me quote some wise and profound words of a modern Roman Catholic theologian: "It is well never to forget that nothing, and least of all God, the deepest of all the realities, is known to us at all, except in and by means of its relation to our own self or to our fellow-creatures. Hence, if love were pure only in proportion as it could be based upon our apprehension of God as independent of all relation to ourselves, pure love would be simply impossible for us. But in truth such a conception would be false in itself; it would imply that the whole great Incarnation fact and doctrine was taking us, not towards, but away from, our true goal." There is the root of the matter. God is not to be found in some dehumanised void of the soul's wilful making. He is to be found where He has deigned to place Himself in order that we might know Him at all—in the midst of our human relations. There alone is it possible for us men to serve Him, and there He condescends to ask for our service. It is only through our fellow-men that we can serve God. And it is only the God in them that we can love and serve immediately. And even when that love

and service carry us on to some further vision of God which seems beyond our human sphere, that vision is still but an ideal of what humanity might be and ought to be. That is what the Incarnation, both as fact and doctrine, means. God has ordained that all our knowledge of Him and His will should be mediated to us through the relations inherent in our human state.

So, then, our question is answered. The quality of prayer has not been necessarily reduced by the immense increase in the interests and activities of our modern world. More than ever is prayer, as a constant spiritual state, needed as the leaven of those activities. The supreme need of our complex modern life is not the suppression of a single legitimate interest which it has evolved, but the subordination of all its other interests to, and their due co-operation in, the supreme interest of the making of the Kingdom of God, the extension and deepening of the Divine justice in human relations—not arbitrary simplification of interests, but their unification as a single instrument of the Divine will. Each of us who would have his share in life so conceived and lived must recover and make his own the old Christian conception of prayer. The reduced conception of prayer which has become so widely current among us is not sufficient for our needs. Let me, as conclusion to what I have written, quote some words of a contemporary master of the spiritual life, Bishop Gore: "Prayer is not to be an attempt to persuade God to do what He had not

intended to do. If we could succeed in doing that, it would be to our loss. Prayer is a method of liberating the hand of God to do what He would do, but cannot do unless we correspond with His will. Intelligent correspondence with the purpose of God—that is the spirit of effective work, and the spirit of all science ; and that is the spirit of effective prayer. It is marvellous how many of the objections urged against the reasonableness of praying fall to the ground at once when this principle is really grasped. . . . The true liberation of human faculties lies in the abandonment of all wilfulness, all foolish imperiousness ; it lies in perfect submission of will to the Divine order ; and this perfect submission, so far from leading to quietism or apathy, is to stimulate to vigorous correspondence the man who now knows himself to be a fellow-worker with God."

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